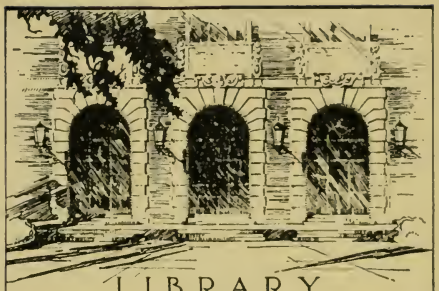

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A LIFE'S DEVOTION.

VOL. III.

A LIFE'S DEVOTION

BY

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"A BITTER REPENTANCE."

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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A LIFE'S DEVOTION.

CHAPTER I.

FEW words passed between father and daughter on their return home. A dark gulf seemed suddenly to have opened out between them. But it was only the gulf of a great and mutually restrained sorrow. He was mourning at having deceived her; she was grieving over her broken faith in this idolised father, and also at his having done that which she instinctively felt would never lead to his happiness.

'Bridget, come here, I have something to tell you,' said Shelah, as she wearily laid her head on the pillow that night.

While preparing for rest, she had hardly spoken. She was considering how, with least blame to her father, she could announce the miserable news she had to communicate. But perhaps Bridget already knew it, for her eyes

were swollen with weeping, and, flinging her arms round the woman's neck, Shelah whispered,

'Bridget, my father has married Mrs. Brown.'

Then the flood-gates of hitherto pent-up sorrow were opened, and the girl's tears fell in torrents. Bridget rejoiced to see them, for her young mistress's hitherto unnatural calm had alarmed the good soul, and, as Shelah laid her head on her motherly bosom, she replied,

'I know it, me darling. God comfort you.'

'And make papa happy,' sobbed Shelah. 'And, Bridget, remember we must neither of us say another word against Mrs. Brown now that papa has married her.' Shelah could not yet bring herself to call her father's wife by the title which had belonged to her own mother, now hers by every lawful right. 'You understand, Bridget,' she added, gently, though rebellion reigned strong within her own heart against this usurper of her dead mother's place.

'Yes, honey, I do,' meekly responded the nurse, though she inwardly ejaculated, with indignation and wrath, 'Oh, Jezabel, Jezabel! How could he be taken in by you?'

'My dear father,' continued Shelah, 'says she has been very kind and generous to him and deserves our gratitude. But I cannot talk any more to-night, dear old Bridget. I am so tired.

Please give me my butterfly brooch before you go.'

Though astonished at the request, the good Irishwoman brought the trinket without remark. Shelah kissed it and fastened it in her night-dress. Poor Pysche! her wings were drooping, her heart was very sore. She wished to have this token, given by a far-distant friend, near her, in order to retain some certitude that the world was not so hollow, not so topsy-turvy as it had appeared ever since her father's revelation of his marriage. Shelah's was the sweetest, saddest, and most patient of sorrows. But, though Bridget's sympathy for her nursling flowed out in words of tenderest, most loving eloquence, her feelings partook largely of anger and fiery indignation at the widow's triumph. She was, in fact, in a towering passion, displayed with all the vehemence of her strong, sturdy nature.

When Lord Ballina, in guilty, faltering accents, apprized her of his marriage, she looked fixedly at him, saying, sternly,

'I hope this marriage will be for your lordship's happiness, and Miss Shelah's.'

'I hope to heaven it will be for hers, Bridget, for it is for my daughter's sake, and to prevent the estate being sold, that I have married again.'

If he had anticipated mollifying Bridget by this statement he was mistaken, for she replied, curtly,

'It had better have gone, me lord, as far as Miss Shelah is concerned.'

'You will not always be of this opinion, Bridget. And I trust you will not leave Miss Shelah in consequence of my marriage.'

'Leave me darling!' she exclaimed, hysterically. 'Did I not swear on my bended knees to her blessed ladyship that I would never forsake her child until me dying day? And, if I did forsake her, what was my prayer?—that I might die unabsolved, and without the aid of Holy Church! I have not forgotten that solemn vow, me lord, and never will;' and, with these words, the indignant woman flung herself out of the room and from her master's presence, in fear of anger and sorrow causing her to fail in respect to his lordship.

But now, when she had bid good night to her young mistress, and with all Shelah's unselfish, restrained exhibition of sorrow full in her memory, she gave sway to her sentiments of disapproval, exclaiming, as she rocked herself to and fro in her chair, and clapped her hands together in true Irish fashion,

'How could he, how could he have so for-

gotten her blessed ladyship? Oh, you Jezabel, you have painted your face and tired your bould head to some purpose. What will come next?'

This she soon learned. The following day Shelah quietly informed Bridget that her father was going to Rome for six weeks or more, and that they were to return at once to Ballina.

'And this will be delightful,' she added, 'for we can get everything in order for my father's return.'

'He deserts you, leaves his only child for her!' impetuously exclaimed Bridget.

'Hush, dear Bridget, not another word,' decisively responded her young mistress. 'My father wished me to accompany him. But it is best that he and Mrs. Brown should be by themselves at first. And Miss Lawrence, who has been most kind to me, thinks this also. I am not to have a governess, and this I am glad of, until they return home.'

Nothing could exceed the love and tenderness Shelah lavished on her father during the next few days. Though her trust in him was cruelly broken, her love, if possible, was still more increased. She knew he was suffering acutely at the thought of parting from her, for the first time since his widowhood, for so lengthened a period. And he, believing that

her calm, loving demeanour was a proof she was reconciled to his marriage, and had forgiven not only his having broken the promise he had made of never marrying again, but his having so cruelly deceived her, overwhelmed her with marks of paternal love. She had indeed forgiven his deception—had accepted his plea that it was for her sake he had taken this step. But reconciled to such a marriage! that she never would be, for she could never forget the contemptuous manner in which he had in the past so often spoken of her he had made his wife, and, young as she was, she could not help thinking, in her prematurely reflective mind, that no happiness could follow such a marriage as her dear father had so precipitately contracted.

'And is she coming with us to Ireland?' asked Bridget.

'If by *she* you allude to Miss Lawrence, no, Bridget. She prefers remaining at Nice.'

'And a mighty good job too,' thought Bridget, who by no means shared the esteem accorded Adela Lawrence by Shelah.

It had been arranged that Lord Ballina should accompany his daughter in a voiturier's carriage as far as Marseilles, where he had left his bride. The railway was not yet begun between Nice and this seaport. When the moment for their

parting arrived, Shelah, who, in her heroic determination not to grieve her father by any excessive demonstration of sorrow, had hardly fathomed what this separation would cost both, clung to him with despairing tenacity as they bade each other farewell.

'Only two short months at the latest, my precious child, and we shall be together again,' he murmured, as, having placed her in the carriage, he folded her in a last embrace.

'Together again, but never as it has been!' thought Shelah, with a dark foreboding of what the future held in store for both; but she did not give utterance to this sad thought, and a smile rested on her face as long as her father remained in sight, and only when she could no longer see his beloved countenance did she allow the tears to flow unrestrained down her cheeks.

He remained gazing at the train until it had wholly passed from view, when, blinded with the rising mist in his eyes, ashamed to give way in public to his feelings, he hailed a fiacre, and, springing into it, flung himself back, and gave way to a paroxysm of unrestrained grief, exclaiming, 'Fool, madman that I was! Now that it is too late, I can see the irretrievable error of which I have been guilty. Helen, Helen!

You can never forgive what I have done.'

'The gods are just, and of our pleasant vices make instruments to plague us.' From the very moment Lord Ballina had left the church door, with his exulting bride hanging on his arm—for had she not for ever dissolved partnership with the odious name of Brown in the vestry of that sacred building which had converted her into Lady Ballina?—he was a prey to profound regrets and remorse for what he had done and could now never undo. If this was so on the auspicious day, what was it a week later, when constant association with the late Mrs. Brown had assured him how little she was in any way suited to him? Handsome—decidedly handsome—he quickly discovered that beneath her flashy, sensuous countenance there dwelt absolutely nothing. His wife—yes, his wife, for nothing could alter this material fact—was wholly devoid of any intellectual aspirations; not one noble or refined sentiment had a place in her composition. She was not an uncheerful companion, and she was certainly endowed with a practical, business-like mind, but it was also eminently common-place. She discussed his debts, and the quickest mode of relieving him from them, with an absence of tact and delicacy that made the refined Ballina wince as though

she had struck him in the face, while he shrank like a sensitive plant beneath her constant allusions to her own wealth, which was to free him from the burden of his liabilities and set him straight before the world. Then he quickly made the unpleasing discovery that, notwithstanding her great personal adoration of himself, she was devoured by ambition and a longing to enter London society, into which the bare idea of returning with a view of introducing her to those who had known his first wife, appeared like a nightmare. Long ere the honeymoon was over, his soul was weary within him at her incessant queries respecting London society and the London season.

'I intend to hold a salon such as the Parisian ladies used to have,' (Lady Ballina had a very hazy idea who these ladies might be), 'and where you, my Jupiter, will be the presiding and ruling spirit,' she observed, triumphantly, a few days after their marriage. 'I have written to my agent to look out for the largest house in the best situation in London that is for sale.'

Ballina laughed convulsively. He had determined on passing the whole summer in Ireland. But it was too soon yet to display his hand. He must, if he could not be so loving as she had a right to expect in these first days of

matrimony, at least be gracious and complaisant to the wife to whom he was so hatefully and humiliatingly indebted.

Had Lord Ballina been suddenly divested of that luxuriant golden beard in which Shelah took such pride, and which in his bride's eyes was one of his most attractive glories, the great weakness of his character would have been obvious in the narrow receding form of his chin. Lady Ballina was uneducated and wholly devoid of humour, but she had a strong obstinate will, and, as she had proved, a tenacity of purpose unshakeable. And, though Ballina might eventually show his hand, her firmer grasp would ever be the strongest, and keep his under subjection. Even now, irritated at her husband's absence, which had exceeded the limits prearranged between them, Lady Ballina, as she must henceforth be termed, was fuming and fretting with jealous passion, for she realised, and with perfect truth, that he was detained by a superior affection she could never aspire to weaken. She had written him a letter of adoring, if imperative, command to return to her side, but parental affection had predominated, and her missive remained unheeded. Indeed, the tardy husband unnecessarily slept a night on the road between

Nice and Marseilles, in order to prolong the last hours with his daughter.

Some misgivings rose in his mind, as he neared the hotel where he had left his bride, with respect to the reception she would accord him in consequence of his protracted absence. And, torn and lacerated as was his whole being by the parting from Shelah, he felt it would be incumbent on him to disguise these feelings. But Lady Ballina had the wisdom to display no resentment at his prolonged absence, and received him with smiles and an excess of tenderness with which he could well have dispensed. Flinging herself into his arms, she exclaimed,

'At last! at last! I cannot be jealous, for it is Shelah who has kept you from me. But I must be first now, remember—for I am your wife.'

At this moment, with those unloved arms clinging round his neck, Lord Ballina loathed himself for the committal of those follies which had landed him in his present hideous position of falseness and humiliation.

The next day the newly-married couple started for Rome. As soon as Lord Lillburne had heard of his friend's marriage, it being too

late for expostulation or advice, he had simply written him a letter of quiet congratulation, and, hearing that Shelah was returning to Ireland, had begged she might be allowed to stay at his house on her way through London, where they were detained owing to the illness of Mabel's mother.

Tired, weary in spirit, Shelah drove with Bridget to Lillburne House on their arrival in town. Here she received the warmest of welcomes from both Mabel and Lord Lillburne, especially from the latter, who with the truest and most unobtrusive sympathy seemed to understand all she was suffering. Mabel, with a want of tact arising from want of feeling, was inclined at first to make merry over Lord Ballina's marriage, and after welcoming Shelah observed,

'What a little innocent you must be, Shelah, never to have found out that Mrs. Brown was angling to catch your handsome father.' Then, observing a look of strong disapproval expressed on the girl's sad face at her ill-timed pleasantry, she added, hastily, 'Never mind, dear, stepmothers are not so black as they are painted. And now you will be able to come out with brilliant *éclat*, for you know she is immensely rich, and will be only too glad to find in you

a legitimate excuse for giving any amount of balls and parties.'

I have not the slightest desire to come out in London,' responded Shelah, who hated and despised those riches which she knew had alone tempted her father to marry his present wife.

'But *she* does, I can tell you. Why, you sweet simpleton, that is her principal reason for having married your father. He gives her a title, she confers upon him the means of properly upholding it; a perfectly fair bargain in every way.'

'No, no,' exclaimed Shelah. 'Be just. She loves my father. And, if she wishes to come to London, they can leave me in Ireland, where I shall be quite happy.'

To demonstrate the veracity of this statement, Shelah burst into tears. She knew every word Lady Lillburne had said was true, but she did not care to acknowledge this, even to herself, and that others should be acquainted with the reasons which had induced her father to marry again was intolerable to Shelah. Lord Lillburne, who had the deepest compassion for the sorrow cast over her young life by the fortuitous circumstances of Lord Ballina's second marriage, was most anxious to retard her journey to Ireland, and warmly invited her to prolong her

visit to him. Captain Thornton used all the eloquence at his command, likewise, to persuade her to remain. But, notwithstanding her father had given her permission to stay with the Lillburnes as long as she cared to do so, no pursuasions were of any avail. Our deepest sorrows are often those we must necessarily bear silently and alone, that we would not, if we could, reveal to any mortal being, because they are caused by those we love, and we would not lower these loved ones in the eyes of others, for any saving of sorrow to ourselves.

This was Shelah's case; she had but one desire at present: to behold once again the home of her happy childhood, that she had kept in such vivid remembrance, though so many years had elapsed since she had left it. There alone she could nurse her grief in peace and solitude; there alone could she find a little happiness while separated from her father. She also longed to get away from Lady Lillburne's ironical remarks on his marriage, and constant allusions to the gay future this event had opened out for her.

Absorbed, however, as she was in her own grief, she noted with innocent pleasure how greatly Lord Lillburne's manner was changed towards his wife, how forbearing and conciliatory it was in every way. Of course her deep

mourning enforced entire retirement from London gaieties, but he had given Mabel carte blanche, later on, to ask whom she pleased to their northern castle, where they were to retire as soon as Lady Melville's health was re-established.

He had extended the same permission to Dick Thornton, giving him full leave to invite any of his men-friends he liked, saying, as he was heir to the property, he wished him to take an interest in it during his own life-time. In fact, he put the young man in the position of an elder son, for in that light it pleased him to consider Dick, who, immeasurably gratified by the pleasant footing in which he suddenly found himself placed, was more than ever fired with the desire of effecting a complete reconciliation between Lord and Lady Lillburne, without any foresight or passing reflection of the dangerous position which he unhesitatingly accepted.

So genuine and strong was the liking which Lord Lillburne had taken for Captain Thornton that he actually became a match-maker, and contemplated the possibility of ultimately bringing about an alliance between Shelah and his heir, and confided this matrimonial scheme to Mabel with considerable satisfaction, as one most suitable and feasible of accomplishment. She

laughed at the new light in which her husband was displaying himself, and gave no discouragement to his idea. Shelah was too young to interfere with her at present, or for Captain Thornton to fall in love with. She could enjoy his society and friendship for some time to come, and it was a friendship in which Mabel found much pleasure and excitement. He was a most charming censor of her short-comings. And then her husband liked him quite as much as she did, and it was the first time he had never displayed the remotest jealousy of one who appreciated her. Why should she not have a sympathetic friend as well as other married women? It was the fashion of the day—a delightful and allowable privilege in the society to which she belonged. If Captain Thornton were to evince too great an admiration for her, it would be very easy to relegate him into his right place. A little innocent flirtation, in the meanwhile, would do him no harm. From the insight we have of Lady Lillburne's character, we gain the knowledge that she based her future relations with the captain on very different foundations from his. She sought amusement and flirtation, he the promotion of the greater peace and happiness of her married life.

The words of the dying have a potency, and

carry a weight with them, often denied to speakers in vigorous health. And the great change in Lord Lillburne's manner towards his wife mainly arose from the effects of a letter written him by Mabel's father when aware he was dying and that there was no hope of his seeing either his daughter or his son-in-law again.

Disturbed in his last moments by strong misgivings as to the part he had taken in urging his daughter to make an unloved marriage, fears for her future, knowing how frivolous and vain she was, combined also with latent doubts of Lord Lillburne's perfect sanity in consequence of what Mabel had herself asserted, Lord Melville had been moved to address his son-in-law in words of touching and solemn warning in respect of his bearing towards his wife. He implored him to forget the many and grievous causes of offence he had against her, and by gentler and more considerate conduct and renewed confidence to silence the malign gossip his past excessive if just severity at her follies had occasioned ; thus to let the world acknowledge there had been no cause for the scandal their sudden flight abroad had raised, and which was likely to seriously interfere with her sister's prospects.

Even in the supreme moment of death, Lord

Melville was not indifferent to the shallow judgments of this world. But, notwithstanding the world still held its magic power over Lord Melville even in his dying moments, his whole letter breathed such touching interest in his daughter's welfare that it struck the spring of those softer, but hitherto suppressed feelings in Lord Lillburne's breast, and powerfully influenced his future demeanour towards his wife, and aided to effect that change in his character which association with his gentle, young friend Shelah had already begun.

CHAPTER II.

It was early in the hopeful season of spring when Shelah returned to the home she had left so many years back; but not, as then, in a dilapidated, rattling post-chaise, with its ill-fed horses and ragged postillion, for in her absence a great civilising power had visited the little village adjoining her father's park, and it now boasted of its own railroad station. Though the announcement of her return had been sudden, great and festive arrangements had been organised to welcome this event. She found not only her uncle, Mr. Fitz-Maurice, waiting at the station to greet her, but here also were assembled most of her father's tenantry, many of them as ragged as of yore, and some still visibly displaying the dire effects of the past famine in their sickly, half-starved countenances. But gratitude for all that a self-sacrificing, noble spirit had done for them during that woeful

time which had deprived this beautiful girl returning to her home of a mother's love, and such a mother! was alive in every breast, combined with the profoundest pity and sympathy for her only child in consequence of this good and gracious lady's place being now filled by a stranger.

Amongst the motley, excited crowd waiting to catch a first glimpse of their returned queen, Mick was foremost, and as she appeared, leaning on her uncle's arm, with a radiant smile on her face,—for at this moment Shelah was happier than she had been since parting from her father,—the fisherman rushed forward, and, flinging himself on his knees before her, kissed her hands, her dress, and would have descended to her feet had she allowed him, as he exclaimed,

'Oh! but it's the lovely lady ye have grown into. So tall and stately. It's every inch a queen ye are.' Then, flinging his cap into the air, he started to his feet, shouting out, 'Now, boys, three cheers for our queen.' And, giving the initiative, such a shout of rejoicing welcome rose on the air as could only proceed from Hibernian lungs.

As she listened to the enthusiastic greeting of her old friends, the girl's heart swelled with mingled feelings of joy and sorrow, until it

seemed to her as though it would burst. When the cheering finally subsided, she held out her hand to Mick, and, taking his hard, horny palm in hers, said, half-laughing and half-crying,

'Mick, Mick, I can hardly bear it. I am so glad to see you again—to see all the dear people. I have forgot nothing. I have so longed to be back amongst you. And how beautiful all these arches are! But,' she added, gravely, 'remember, I am a deposed queen now.' She pointed as she spoke to one of the leafy decorations on which was blazoned in huge golden letters: 'Greetings to Queen Shelah.' 'You should have kept all these grand arrangements to welcome papa's and—' she hesitated; then added, bravely, 'and Lady Ballina's home-coming.'

'We have plenty more welcomes in waiting for those who desarves them. We haven't forgot his lordship, God presarve him!' answered Mick, diplomatically. 'But to-day, queen, our hearts are all for you.'

As Mr. Fitz-Maurice hurried his niece through the crowd to the carriage waiting to receive her, she kissed her hand and nodded repeatedly to those around. Every now and then singling out some one she recognised, and speaking a few kind words to this lucky

individual, who immediately became the envy of the less fortunate.

'Ah, isn't she a purty creature; and not grown a bit proud? Jist our own queen with all her purty manners,' said one.

'And isn't she like her dear ladyship, with her sweet smile? May the blessed St. Patrick have ye in his keeping, ye darlin',' observed another.

Suddenly a woman, who had evidently arrived late at the station, thrust herself impetuously through the crowd, screaming out,

'Let me see her, let me lay me eyes once more on her ladyship's choild,' and, flinging herself at Shelah's feet, she wailed out, 'Och, me darlin'—me beautiful choild. It was through her angel's koindness to me and mine that you were deprived of a mother's love and care. God rest her pure sowl. Ah me! and it's a stranger takes her place. How will it fare with ye, me poor young lady? for step-mothers have stony hearts for the childers of another.'

'Uncle—uncle—I can bear no more,' whispered Shelah. 'Let us get home.'

She was trembling with agitation and excitement, and had turned so white that Mr. Fitz-Maurice hurried her into the carriage as quickly as possible. But her triumphant reception was not yet accomplished, for, while the assembled

peasantry again set up a wild shouting and cheering, the horses were taken from the carriage, and a body of the most stalwart men proceeded with many vociferations to drag it rapidly and victoriously homewards. The park was but a short distance from the station, and so energetic were their movements that the carriage was quickly out of sight. Her mistress having disappeared, Bridget, who had been looking after the luggage, now received an ovation on her own account. Mick, in the excitement of the moment, embraced her with a resounding smack on both cheeks—a demonstration of welcoming joy she was far too happy to resent, though she considered propriety necessitated her saying, 'That he was the same unmannerly cub as he ever was,' and she requested him to keep his distance.

'And it's not a bit changed ye are yerself, Bridget dear, for ye have come back as impolite as ye went,' he replied, laughing, 'and how did ye like foreign parts and the foreign gossoons? Did ye keep them at a cowld distance too, Mrs. Bridget?' he asked, with a wink, as he settled her on the car he was in charge of for the purpose of conveying Shelah's modest baggage up to the big house.

'I kept meself to meself as far as they were

concarned,' she answered, tartly. 'The best of them are no better than hathens.' Then thawing beneath the influence of exuberant joy at finding herself once more on native and congenial soil, she burst into amicable confidence, saying, 'The way the lot robbed his lordship, Mick, would have given you the heartache. And as to their cooking, about which there's so much cry, och! if ye could see how they murder the potatoes. But, glory be to the Lord, we are back in the blessed, ould counthry again, and it's glad Miss Shelah is to be here. It's nothing but throuble the poor lamb's had since his lordship desarted Ireland.'

'The queen looks lovely, but sorrowful-like, Bridget. But tell me, dear, about the new bride. What's she like?'

'Like—like Jezabel,' blurted out Bridget, scornfully.

'And who was she, dear Bridget?'

'Well, now, but yer ignorant as iver, Mick,' she replied. 'I can tell you this much, she was no great shakes, and the dogs——' here, suddenly remembering that Shelah had enjoined her to make no disparaging remarks about her father's wife, she broke off short, and said, crossly: 'I've nothing more to say. Ye can find out for yerself what she's like when ye clap

yer eyes on her. Ther's no use botherin' with questions about those not worth the breath ye waste on them.'

'It's truth ye spake there, Bridget,' sorrowfully responded Mick, convinced he would gain nothing by prolonging this topic of conversation.

None but those who love their home and country with passionate fervour, and to whom every memory it holds is one of intense though past happiness, can enter into the feelings of supreme, yet chastened joy with which Shelah's whole being was penetrated at finding herself once more in the home of her blissful childhood. Its memory, in which was embalmed that of her mother, was so true and vivid that, though but a child when she left it, every nook and corner of the place, every view of the lake and its islands, were as familiar to her eyes as though years had not parted her from the home Helen Ballina had loved so well, and by whose hand it had been so beautified.

Although labour during the landlord's lengthened absence had been carried out on the estate on a most diminished scale, the gardens and pleasure-grounds laid out by the late Lady Ballina were, owing to Mr. Fitz-Maurice's supervision, still in tolerable order, and Shelah had received full power from her father to restore

everything, both in the house and place, where restoration was necessary. She was to spare no expense, in order that his Irish home might make a good impression on its new mistress, as his greatest desire was in the future to live there permanently. To fulfil her father's wishes would have been an enchantment to Shelah, could she have forgotten to whose money they were indebted, which enabled her to carry out his instructions. But this unforgotten fact carried a sting with it, marring much of her pleasure, and, when its sobering influence was in the ascendant, she would endeavour to drive away the humiliating recollection by roaming the whole day over bogs, and through the woods, or remain on the lake for hours with Mick, listening to his wild legends, or wilder speculations on his country's future.

After Shelah had been a few weeks at home, considering she must feel lonely with no more cultivated companion than Bridget, Mr. Fitz-Maurice had pressed his niece to reside with him until her father returned. But Shelah loved her solitude, and pleaded she was far too occupied to leave home. Then she had no sympathetic memories or associations with her cousins. They were all much older than she was, and were now tall handsome young women. Their

gentle, unselfish mother had died at the birth of her last infant, leaving to her husband the solution of that problem which had in earlier days cost both him and his patient spouse many a heart-ache—the settlement of their numerous offspring in life. But this difficult problem had solved itself much more satisfactorily than either could have anticipated. Elder sons, lacking ability to work for competitive examinations, had emigrated, been fortunate, and, sending for their younger brethren, had pushed them on in their struggle for existence, while his daughters, having contracted advantageous marriages, took younger sisters to reside with them. Thus, Mr. Fitz-Maurice's family circle being happily narrowed, he was enabled to throw himself with a clear conscience into his favourite pursuit, literature, which he did with all the avidity of a student long deprived of mental food.

When Shelah arrived, astonished to find her father had not provided her with a governess, and discovering how intelligent she was, how she delighted in the acquirement of fresh knowledge, he proposed to become her instructor in certain branches of that higher education his own progeny had been ill-disposed to favour. She accepted his offer of instruction with grateful enthusiasm, such hard

studies effectually prevented her becoming morbid or brooding too much over her sorrows. She was delighted with her uncle and his teaching. He was equally so with her intelligence and quickness, he discovered in her a charming companion, fast friends they soon became, and, although after the first few weeks of her homecoming she often felt sad and very lonely, time for Shelah did not pass unprofitably; while certainly her life was more free from care than it had hitherto been.

From her father she heard constantly, and he seemed, if not very cheerful, certainly not unhappy. Poor Lord Ballina! he made the best of things in writing to his daughter, while every letter he wrote breathed the fulness of his unalterable love for her. And, notwithstanding the date decided on for his return to Ireland had long elapsed, she began to look forward to the future with more elastic hope, lessened dread. In any case, those overwhelming fears his passion for gambling had given rise to were ended, and, acknowledging to herself that release from these fears was owing to his marriage, she resolved when she and her step-mother were again thrown together to behave to her father's wife in every way that duty and love to him enjoined.

To Hugh, Shelah wrote only after much anxious reflection and some lapse of time, for she well knew that from him her father's hasty marriage would meet with the strongest condemnation. To soften and extenuate the step he had taken must be her filial task, for to her it was one of the most grievous reflections that he should be lowered in Hugh's opinion. The writing of this letter cost her tears of love, shame, and mortification. At last, after tearing up many copies, having written one she deemed satisfactory it was sent, and she now awaited with the deepest anxiety his reply.

In the meanwhile, notwithstanding her uncle's kindness and her numerous occupations, it was impossible for Shelah, as the days flowed past in unvarying monotony, and her father gave no sign of returning home, not to feel anxious at his protracted sojourn abroad. As the spring advanced towards its close and gave place to summer, a great weariness of spirit oppressed her, and she was seized with an unaccountable dread of something serious having occurred, for it was nearly a fortnight since she had received a letter from abroad. Such a grievous occurrence had never happened before. That her father had forgotten her, that his

love was diminished, Shelah never credited for a moment, yet she found it very difficult to account for this mysterious silence. She was brooding over it in bitter disappointment one morning, as she sat on the terrace overlooking the lake, the post-bag having again arrived containing no letter for her. Hitherto, owing to Bridget's advice, she had refrained from bathing or indulging in her favourite pastime of swimming; but on this day the sun was so hot, the air so balmy, the temptation offered of the sparkling waters so irresistible, that, feeling restless and disinclined for study, she threw prudence to the winds, and, running impulsively down to the bathing-house, donned her swimming attire and plunged into the lake, gasping for breath as she came in contact with its icy cold waters, as yet unwarmed by summer suns.

Mick, who was mending his nets at a little distance off as he sat in his boat smoking a short pipe, had seen her flying down towards the bathing-house, and, guessing her intention, seized his oars and rowed to the spot, in hopes of preventing his young mistress committing so great an imprudence. But she was already in the water, and laughingly urged him to a race. Soon, however, she discovered for herself that it was too early in the year for the prolongation

of such watery sport, and, calling out to him to land and join her, she swam hastily back to the bathing-house. Shortly afterwards she reappeared, with her long fair hair falling about her in wet streams, and a face rosy from her late exertions. Beckoning to the fisherman to follow, she bent her steps to a favourite resort of her mother's, where it had often been the late Lady Ballina's habit to give her little daughter instruction in past days. The place was hallowed to Shelah in consequence, and here she often spent hours in reading and working. It was a beautiful sequestered little bay, and certainly a most picturesque spot, surrounded as it was on all sides, except that facing the water, by a thick plantation of firs and larch, the latter just bursting into tender green, while low waving willows dipped their branches into the lake.

Having seated herself on a large grey boulder, Shelah commanded the fisherman to sit by her, and then began slowly and absently to comb out her dripping hair. For some time she had been desirous to ask Mick a question, but courage had hitherto always failed her. To-day, though she still hesitated, she was determined to delay no longer. There was a delicious stillness reigning all around, but slightly broken by the riplets of the lake breaking in gentle

cadence on the pebbly shore. Occasionally a wild duck, of which there were myriads in the vicinity, for they were never allowed to be shot, would break from cover of reed and sedge, and, in cheerful security of remaining unmolested, wing its happy flight to one of the far-off islands, or a shining trout would make a plunge out of the water at an unlucky fly hovering on the surface within tempting reach of its jaws.

Silently, her eyes fixed on space, as though she were striving to pierce through that veil which mercifully conceals the future from all of us, Shelah sat for many minutes. She had ceased to arrange her disordered locks, and, unnoticed, had let the comb drop on the ground, while resting her elbows on her knees she supported her pretty chin in her hands, as she gazed down into the water, lost in reflection.

Neither by word nor movement would Mick disturb the current of his queen's meditations. For him it was quite sufficient bliss and honour to watch her with adoring admiration and reverence. And indeed that he should do so was not wonderful; for, though Mick's exterior was rough and unromantic, his mind had a poetic, as well as humorous turn, and he could fully appreciate the picture of youth, beauty, and innocence which Shelah at this moment pre-

sented. Suddenly, without moving or changing her attitude in the least degree, she began to chant, in a low, inexpressibly touching voice, the first lines of Moore's pathetic Irish melody,

'Silent, oh! Moyle, be the roar of thy water,
Break not, ye breezes, your chain of repose,
While, murmuring mournfully, Lir's lonely daughter
Tells to the night-star her tale of woes.
When shall the swan, her death-note singing,
Sleep, with wings in darkness furl'd?
When shall heaven, its sweet bell ringing,
Call my spirit from this stormy world?'

Unknown to herself, the tears were coursing down the singer's cheeks. The sadness of her thoughts had unconsciously found vent, and she was breathing out her soul's sorrow in mournful melody. She looked so like the denizen of another sphere as she gently sang this plaintive lament that for an instant the fisherman remained spell-bound, almost anticipating he would see his young mistress expand a pair of white wings and soar out of sight. But Mick's common-sense quickly urged him to rouse his young mistress out of the morbid state of melancholy into which she was evidently plunged, and he said, humorously,

'Och, me queen, that's a moighty doleful ditty. Though, indeed, heaven's the fittest abode for the likes of ye. For this is an ugly, black-hearted world, betimes, bad cess to it.'

'No, no, Mick, not an ugly world,' replied Shelah, laughing, as she took the comb, and, began twisting up her hair. 'A beautiful world. What can look more beautiful than the lake to-day? I don't know what put that melancholy song into my head, except that, like "Lir's lonely daughter," I have felt sad lately—sad at my father's prolonged absence, and then it is more than a fortnight since I last heard from him, and you know he is not far away now—they are at Paris.'

A grave look passed over the fisherman's face, and to conceal it he rubbed his horny palm over this tell-tale expression, saying,

'Those French gossoons, maybe, are not over handy in the post-office. Foreigners are moighty stupid. But yer shure to get a letter from his lordship shortly, Queen Shelah. It's all the world like a mermaid, ye look, combing yer beautiful locks. Ye know, queen, in days gone by, they used to glide about upon the lake dressing their golden hair by moonlight.' Though Mick gave full credence to this superstitious legend, as he did to many others equally extravagant, he only now alluded to it in order to divert the current of Shelah's thoughts from the subject in question, for there was a terrible report gone abroad, as yet concealed from her.

'I should like to have seen the mermaids, Mick,' she answered, falling into his vein. 'Why have they deserted the lake? They would be merry companions for me now.'

'*She* banished them,' he whispered. 'They were kindly sperrits, and feared her, so one fine day they took themselves off, and have never been seen since. But me father, God rest his honest sowl, has told me that, as a boy, he often saw them combing their long locks and singing their purty songs by the lake side.'

Shelah could not quite swallow this tale; but she would not betray incredulity, and its narration gave an opening for asking the question she had long wished to ask, and she said,

'I wish the mermaids had remained on the lake, and hunted the Banshee off it, Mick. But tell me, have you ever heard *her* since we left? or since my mother's death? I have long wished to ask this question.'

'Niver, queen, niver. She worked mischief enough for us all then. Maybe, she is satisfied now, and silenced for iver.'

At that moment, as though in mockery of Mick's expressed hope, a low, dismal wail arose from the Banshee's Island, and floated across the lake to the spot where the speaker sat. At that fatal sound, Shelah sprang to her feet, and,

seizing hold of the fisherman's arm, fixed her eyes upon him in speechless terror.

'It's only the sough of the wind in the branches above, me darlin' queen,' he exclaimed, assuringly, 'nothin' more.' He knew he was lying, and, even as he spoke, that dismal wail increased in strength and volume, until it ended, abruptly, in the usual hideous, unearthly shriek known to be the Banshee's final yell. With an echoing cry of despair, Shelah flung her arms in the air exclaiming, wildly,

'My father—my father is ill. I knew it—I felt it.' In another moment, with her golden hair dishevelled and streaming out upon the breeze, she was running with deer-like speed towards the house, closely followed by the distracted Mick.

CHAPTER III.

In the far south of the great Russian Empire, whither our story now carries us, it is a moonless, but clear bright night, for a biting, intense frost holds its icy sceptre over the seat of distant warfare, and myriads of stars are shining down with cruel brilliancy from the dark vault of heaven, over the vast, ice-bound plains of the Crimea, the scene of so many gallant deeds and hard-fought victories. Here, lying in the trenches before Sebastopol, are our brave English soldiers, badly fed, insufficiently clothed, and but ill-protected from the inclemency of one of the severest winters ever known.

In these posts of deadly danger, some are solacing themselves with tobacco, chatting meanwhile in whispers about their numerous hairbreadth escapes, or of the chances of the campaign coming to an end, and Sebastopol being taken. Others are sleeping, and on the countenance of one or two there rests a smile, for loved ones,

praying for them at home, have visited them in their dreams. All are equally unconscious or indifferent to dangers to which habit has rendered them careless, while most, overpowered by fatigue, sleep dreamlessly and profoundly. Each individual considers his own life invulnerable for

'Man looks upon all men as mortal, save themselves.'

And, though from the Malakoff and Redan the enemy's fire incessantly pours, no word is spoken save the sentinels low, warning cry of 'Look out.' The pipe is not taken from the smoker's mouth, the weary sleepers hardly stir, not even when the shrill cry of agony rising up to heaven from one of their number announces that to him this rude disturbance of earthly slumber has proved the awakening into eternal day.

There was one watcher, however, who, during all the dark and cheerless hours of night, never closed his eyes, but paced incessantly to and fro. His thoughts, his heart and soul were miles away. He had in imagination strayed back many years in his life, and was roaming over bog and lake in company with a golden-haired, fairy child, to whom he had vowed ever to be a friend and protector. A child grown almost into a woman now, and the thought of whose sorrows at this moment completely absorbed his whole being.

For a short time back, just as he was beginning to feel considerable anxiety at receiving no news from Nice, Hugh Carmichael—for he it was who was the wakeful watcher—got a letter from Lord Ballina, written the week after his marriage, and announcing this surprising event. Nothing could have exceeded Hugh's indignation and astonishment at this unexpected intelligence. That Ballina could entertain the slightest affection for the woman he had made his wife, he never for one moment credited. But then how low must Helen's husband have sunk, for he could only have contracted such a marriage from mercenary motives, and in selfish indifference to Shelah's feelings.

He had hardly patience to read to the end of poor Ballina's letter, who in no way strove to extenuate the step he had taken. He simply said that the desperate state of his finances, the inability in which he had placed himself by again giving way to temptation of being able to pay his debts of honour—and these included the money so generously advanced him by Hugh,—had driven him to accept the aid his marriage with Mrs. Lawrence Brown promised. 'What mad folly,' exclaimed Hugh; 'surely he must have known I would have given my last farthing to avert this blow from falling upon

Shelah. Why allude to that miserable loan, when I told him everything I possess in the world would be hers some day?' Bitterly Hugh regretted that he had been restrained by fear of Ballina's gambling propensities from telling him that he was ready at any moment to take up the mortgages on his Irish estates, and thus permanently make certain that Shelah's inheritance should not pass into other hands, whereas now, if Ballina had a son, she would lose everything.

He flung the letter on the ground in scorn of his friend's weakness, and in deep disappointment at the failure of all his generous scheming for Shelah's welfare, his inability to be of any help or comfort to her at a moment when she most required all his sympathy. Yes, he must in future be more careful, for her loved sake, of every stray bullet. He must not expose himself so carelessly to the enemy's fire as he had hitherto done, for surely the day was at hand when Shelah might have only him to turn to for guidance and support. For, with such a character as Ballina's, would he not be under complete subservience to this new wife, to whom he had positively sold himself.

But, since the receipt of Lord Ballina's letter, he had received one from a different hand, and,

though it had in no way lessened profound disapprobation of his conduct, it went a long way to soften his feelings against the offender. This letter was from Shelah, and it breathed throughout such perfect resignation to her father's marriage, that it tended to console Hugh for what could now never be undone. In every way, where it was possible, this loving daughter extenuated her father's unadvised marriage. 'Do not—do not blame him over much, I implore of you,' she wrote. 'Strange as such a marriage may appear, he has thought of me throughout, has had my welfare ever in view. And Mrs. Lawrence Brown is really attached to my dear father, and he tells me her generosity has been unbounded; and then, Hugh, Ballina, dear Ballina, need not now be sold. You did not know of this sad possibility; and though alone here, and at times solitary and sad, I am so glad to be in my old home once again. I find I have forgotten nothing; and my father and Mrs. Brown—Shelah had scratched this name out, substituting for it Lady Ballina, but Hugh could plainly perceive a tear had fallen on the page—'intend spending all the summer and autumn in Ireland. Oh! Hugh, this makes up for so much, and the tenantry are so delighted. I wish you could have seen the reception they gave me. I

read somewhere the other day, that all nations bear a similitude to each other, except the Irish, who are unlike every other people; and so they are, for they are more grateful for kindness, more humorous and long-suffering than any other nation in the whole world. I feel so happy amongst them, so grieved we have wasted so many years far from our own home and people. But I sorely miss the companionship of my dear father; and when will you be with us again—when will that happy time arrive? Do you recollect our first meeting on the bog? Ah, what a friend you have been to me ever since! When will this dreadful war be ended? Take care of yourself in those horrible trenches. I was told by Captain Thornton that you are reckless of danger, and expose yourself to every risk.'

A perceptible movement of annoyance crossed Hugh's face at this allusion to Dick Thornton, who had, much to his own disgust, been left in England with the dépôt of his regiment, —the reason of his not being at the seat of war. Shelah had frequently alluded to him before, and in terms of praise for his kindness to herself. But Hugh by no means relished these praises. He had no desire that she should make any new friends, especially in his absence. He smiled, however, in contempt of his own an-

noyance and in happy confidence that, as yet, he had no rival, as he read her concluding words:

'I think my heart would break if anything happened to you, for I have no other friend I can trust in this world.'

Alas! though in the deep recesses of her heart Shelah knew what she had said was true, with quick self-reproach she had added, 'And my dear father.'

'Ah, what sort of friend has he been to you, my poor Shelah! "Unstable as water," he has proved faithless alike to his fatherly trust and to the memory of Helen. How well she must have read his character, understood all its weakness!' were Hugh's reflections as he closed Shelah's letter, which did not contain one word of reproach against her father, nor one selfish murmur at an event certain to mar still further the happiness of a life that had already been most sad and chequered.

Placing Shelah's letter in his pocket, and disinclined to seek repose, he lit a cigar—that soothing aid to reflection which men have ever at hand—and as the soft clouds of smoke, emitted by his fragrant weed, rose on the air, there floated before his eyes a vision, a dream often indulged in before and ever chased away quickly as utterly absurd and impossible of realization.

But now, as it once again visited Hugh, it assumed the form of charming possibility. After all, there was but a difference of a dozen or fifteen years between him and Shelah—no such great disparity. A man can hardly be in love with a child; but this child would, in two or or three years, be a woman. From her earliest childhood she had been unlike all others, and for years had been his one sole interest and affection in life. She loved him, trusted him as she trusted no other; this love and confidence had even roused her father's jealousy at one moment. And, now that he had so cruelly wounded her, might she not turn to him with fuller love and confidence than ever? Premature sorrow and anxious care for another had matured this fair girl's character. She was already a woman in thought and feeling, with the soul of an angel. Rapturous foreshadowing of a most harmonious probability. Why should not he, the guardian and friend of past and present, merge into the lover, the husband, at no very distant date?

In the joy such meditations afforded, Hugh no longer dwelt so gloomily and sternly on his friend's inauspicious marriage, but laughed low and pleasantly as he pressed Shelah's letter to his lips, saying, 'My love, my bride, my heaven-

born Shelah; you, and none other—for thy sake I must hold my life precious. For thy sake.'

In the ecstasy of the moment he spoke these last words aloud, and a waking young subaltern, who had only just arrived in the Crimea, overhearing them, observed, humorously,

'Had you not better, for your own sake, lie down and sleep, colonel? "The grey dawn is breaking," as the poet says. And what with your tramping and the enemy's constant *billets-doux* it is precious little sleep I have had as yet. I am mortally tired-out, and ugh! how cold it is. You have evidently an agreeable inward furnace burning. This, I suppose, keeps you warm.'

Hugh laughed at the young fellow's impertinence as he replied, kindly,

'My poor boy, I am sorry if I have helped to disturb your slumbers. You are not yet acclimatized to our enemy's leaden tokens of attention, nor to these merciless cold nights.'

The young man, overpowered with fatigue, was already asleep again, and, taking a rug in which he had intended to envelop himself when he lay down, Hugh cast it tenderly over the sleeper's figure, saying, compassionately,

'Poor lad! he requires it more than I do. How young he looks, and how his mother's heart would ache if she could see him.'

When Hugh, his long reverie having come to so pleasing a conclusion, proposed to himself to lie down and seek repose, grey dawn, as the young ensign had observed, was breaking. But, though Phœbus proclaimed his advent by a long line of crimson light visible on the horizon, it was evident the great luminary had no intention of gladdening the half-frozen soldiers lying in the trenches; this hopeful line of promise was soon obliterated by an opaque, murky sky. The starlit beauty of the firmament had vanished, while, with stealthy, noiseless dropping, large flakes of snow were commencing to whiten the earth, rendering the position of the freezing and awakening men doubly undesirable.

Even Hugh, case-hardened as he was, began to experience the influence of the piercing matutinal atmosphere, notwithstanding all his ardent dreaming. Shaking the white flakes from his coat—not a fur-lined comfort, for, though provided with one by his friends, he had refused to avail himself of a luxury unshared by others, and had given the precious article to a poor consumptive lad invalided home—and stamping his feet on the frozen earth to promote circulation, he was on the point of laying his tall, well-knit frame on the ground near his young friend, when booming through

the air came the treacherous hum of a well-directed shell. In an instant he had completely sheltered the sleeper from evil by bending his stalwart form over him, while, leaning on his elbow, he remained and listened for the mid-air crash and explosion of the deadly engine of warfare. Not hearing it, with a quick spring he rose to his feet, and at the same moment, right in the midst of the awakening men, fell the unexploded missile, threatening death and destruction to all round. Calm, cool, without an instant's hesitation, with a hasty cry of 'Down on your faces!' Hugh seized the burning weapon of destruction, and with herculean vigour hurled it out of the trench. From the men who for a moment had remained appalled by their peril there arose a wild shout of triumph and applause at a deed of valour that had saved the lives of all, while the young subaltern, springing to his feet, performed a regular war-dance round his commanding officer, in token of admiration of his *sang-froid* and presence of mind.

'Silence!' sternly cried out Hugh. 'Do you wish for a repetition of these pretty toys amongst us?'

His warning was not given without good reason, for a tremendous fire was directed towards the spot from whence such vigorous

shouting had proceeded, forcing the men to seek shelter wherever it could be found in order to avoid the rapid succession of shot and shell bursting over them.

'By Jove, colonel,' whispered the freshly-joined ensign, 'I would go up to the cannon's mouth, lead the forlornest hope, with you in command.'

'I am certain you would, my lad. And opportunity will not lack for you to win your laurels, I am sure.'

Alack! brave young spirit, in another moment he lay stretched at Hugh's feet, struck unto death. The opportunity to win his laurels was never accorded the gallant young soldier.

Few events during the whole course of this terrible war ever affected Colonel Carmichael more than this event. The lad had been specially commended to his care by a mother's anxious love—for he was her only one, and she was a widow, and to Hugh fell the painful task of apprising his unhappy mother of her bereavement. And, though the writing of so grievous an announcement could not have fallen into more sympathising hands, who can tell what untold agonies pierced that mother's heart when she received Hugh Carmichael's letter? And she was but one amongst many hundreds to

whom this most useless of wars carried anguish and bitterness of soul. But in active warfare there is little time for the indulgence of grief at the loss of a comrade, and Colonel Carmichael, high in command, much thought of by his superiors, had his days fully occupied during the weary, disheartening months of this campaign. A soldier every inch of him, his energy in the fulfilment of duty was unflagging, and, notwithstanding he had vowed for Shelah's sake to respect his own life, he invariably, as has already been proved, became oblivious of that vow when opportunity of distinguishing himself offered.

It was not until weeks after the events just narrated that he was forcibly and grievously reminded that his life was vowed to her by an incident most tragic. The long, cruel winter, with all its accompanying hardships, is at last ended. With the rapidity that characterises the Crimean spring, a wonderful change has passed over the face of nature. In a cloudless sky of deepest blue, innumerable larks on suspended wings are vieing with each other in pouring forth sweet songs of delightful melody over the scenes of past carnage and bloodshed. Soft, balmy breezes, impregnating the air with aromatic odours from varied and multitudinous flowers and plants, replace the snowy skies,

icy blasts of bygone winter, while officers and soldiers are alike rejoicing in all the generous stores—warm clothing and many luxuries—arrived, certainly rather late in the day, but provided months before by generous-hearted English men and women.

Luxuriating in the exquisite beauty of this spring day, Colonel Carmichael was riding at a slow pace over the waving Crimean plains, thinking of Shelah and indulging in his favourite dreams of future bliss and of a life of calm happiness to be spent with her. He was returning from a visit to the graves on Cathcart's Hill, and proceeding leisurely to his quarters, in order to write to her, and enclose some wild-flowers he held in his hand, gathered from the graves of our Crimean heroes.

As he neared his camp, he was met by a mounted orderly, with a telegram—a circumstance so common as in no way to disturb the placid frame of his mind. Slowly and rather absently he opened it, and then gave an exclamation of dismay and grief. Reeling in his saddle, the flowers dropped from his hand, for these were the words he read:

'*Ballina died last night from the effects of an accident. Shelah dangerously ill. Come if possible to Paris.—Lillburne.*'

CHAPTER IV.

To account for the tragic event overwhelming Hugh with the deepest sorrow, we are obliged to retrace the thread of our story to a few weeks after Lord Ballina's marriage. The time which he had decided upon as the utmost limit he could bear separation from his daughter had arrived. To him the allotted six weeks had appeared almost interminable; for, day by day, dear-bought experience was teaching him that, of all the lamentable errors into which he had stumbled during the course of his career, his second marriage had been the greatest.

To be bored this mercurial, jovial Irishman had always considered the greatest evil under the sun. And for six long weeks he had been bored to extinction by the woman to whom, by every consideration of manly honour, he was bound to be considerate and attentive. Bravely he strove to conceal the ennui

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consuming him, vainly he endeavoured to swallow the unflattering yawns, with which her talk—conversation it could not be termed—afflicted him. Day by day he missed more acutely Shelah's bright, intelligent companionship, her loving, unselfish thoughtfulness for his well-being, while, occasionally, when he contrasted his present wife with the guiding spirit of his younger years, he felt as though he should go mad, and, with the vehemence of a nature unused to self-restraint, he would, when these feelings were in the ascendant, rush secretly away from his thraldom, and remain for hours absent from the sight of 'his Dora,'—the endearing term by which Lady Ballina always alluded to herself when addressing her husband,—to be received on his return with pouting looks and reproachful tears. In fine, though no unkind word ever passed his lips,—for he recognised that he was only reaping the fruits of his own ill-considered actions,—life had become, to him, so unbearable that, when the day arrived for retracing their steps homewards, with all his most heroic efforts he was unable to disguise his satisfaction that the weeks of martyrdom were at last ended.

But Ballina had yet to fathom a phase of 'his Dora's' character hitherto unrevealed to him.

When, with 'Murray' in his hand and unwonted cheerfulness, he began to discuss with her their route homewards, in order to make arrangements for an immediate departure from Naples, she expressed the strongest desire for a postponement of their journey, and when he urged the impossibility of leaving his daughter any longer in lonely solitude, he encountered a scene of such angry remonstrance that he was positively appalled. For the first time he made the unpleasant discovery that his bride had a temper of unparalleled violence, while all the vulgarity of a low-bred woman was displayed in the passion of rage to which she gave way unrestrainedly on meeting with opposition to her wishes. She obstinately declared she would not visit Ireland, even for a few days, until the autumn, while she had no intention of returning to England except in time for the Drawing-room. Then in the heat of her fury and jealousy at his again alluding to the already long separation from his daughter, and at finding his mind wholly occupied by parental considerations, she coarsely reminded him of the obligations both he and his daughter lay under to her, adding, meaningly, that it would be well for him also to keep in remembrance that there still remained much in her power, for that, as yet, she had not relieved his

property from the heavy mortgages with which it was weighted.

Lord Ballina paled with disgust and dismay beneath the storm he had raised, while he writhed beneath this ungenerous reminder of benefits conferred and for which he had paid so dearly. His refined nature was crushed and shamed by the vulgar and intemperate violence of the woman who now shared his name. Anything—anything sooner than a repetition of so shameful an exhibition. And it ended in his giving in to the prolongation of their tour, the only stipulation he made being that he himself, and no other, should run over to Ireland, and bring Shelah back to London immediately on their arrival in town.

To this, Lady Ballina made no dissent. There was a look on her husband's face that made her feel she had gone too far. Not for worlds would Ballina have made known to his daughter the degrading scene of humiliation through which he had been dragged; and trembling for the harmony of his future domestic life, as well as for hers, he hardly regretted that the moment of bringing Shelah and his wife into closer contact was postponed.

A slight indisposition of Lady Ballina's formed an excellent and valid excuse for delaying their

departure from Naples. But, when restored to convalescence, she was alarmed at finding her husband's manner towards her completely changed; and hurt by his gloomy silence, cold, ceremonious attentions, tendered without any semblance of affection, and fearing she had forfeited any he might have ever entertained for her, she endeavoured to regain the ground she had lost by renewed suavity and demonstrations of adoration, from which he turned away with slightly concealed aversion almost amounting to repugnance. In despair, hating Shelah more than ever as the cause of his altered manner, she inwardly vowed to work heaven and earth, on her arrival in London, to get her step-daughter sent to school; not that she ventured in the present moment to hint this intention to her husband, she must bide her time; for once before, when she had artfully touched upon this subject as a step that might prove advisable, he had replied with such stern firmness, such unqualified disapproval, and had negatived her proposal so determinedly, saying, 'Dora, once for all remember nothing but death or her marriage will ever separate Shelah from me as long as I live,' that Lady Ballina had never dared approach this subject again.

But she had all the obstinacy and tenacity of

purpose of a self-willed woman, long accustomed to compass what she desires, and was fully prepared to battle with him later on, and to succeed. In the meanwhile, she must strive to obliterate from his memory, by every art in her power, the temper and violence into which jealousy of Shelah had so unfortunately betrayed her, and, observing that Ballina had ceased even to pretend to take the slightest interest in his surroundings, she herself after a short time, unable to endure his coldness, proposed their forsaking the orange groves of Sorrento and the blue waters of the Mediterranean for the gay town of Paris, where her Drawing-room attire was to be procured.

Arrived in the capital of revolutions, frivolities, and fashions, she was temporarily relieved from passionate dwelling on her husband's indifference by the lighter but still engrossing attractions offered by Parisian milliners and hair-dressers, and most hours of her day were spent by Lady Ballina at Worth's, or other fashionable dressmakers, in elaborating costumes for her coming social campaign in London. In *her* bosom, worldliness and ambition trod closely on the steps of the softer passion.

In the meanwhile, depressed, wretched, every day becoming more keenly sensible that, to

avoid one evil, he had fallen into another much greater and more unbearable, remorse ever weighing him down more heavily, and gloomily brooding over his protracted desertion of Shelah, and at the prospect of re-entering London society bound by the fetters of a hated wedlock, Ballina wandered aimlessly about the gay streets of Paris, always endeavouring to shun every chance acquaintance he might accidentally meet. A club he never entered, and only occasionally, at Lady Ballina's earnest request, did he visit a theatre. She, though but imperfectly acquainted with the French language, and deriving but little pleasure from the entertainment she witnessed, submitted to be bored, considering this the most fashionable mode of passing her evenings while in Paris. Strange as this may appear, not once had Lord Ballina entertained the slightest desire to enter any resort of play or to touch a card. The passion of gambling, having accomplished its fatal work of annihilating his happiness and self-respect, was dead within him for ever.

One day, being still detained in Paris by tardy milliners and dress-makers, he sought distraction from harassing reflection by a prolonged walk in a retired part of the Bois de Boulogne. As

he trudged inertly and sadly along, his steps were suddenly arrested and his attention placed quickly on the alert by hearing the rapid galloping of horses in the distance. 'Runaways, by Jove!' he muttered. His surmise proved to be correct, for in another minute, rounding a corner of one of the more retired roads of the Bois, there appeared, coming in his direction and at a furious pace, a pair of splendid chestnuts attached to a barouche, evidently but lately out of the builder's hands. As they neared the spot where Ballina was standing, the horses slackened their headlong career and commenced kicking and plunging madly. The carriage, bereft of its driver, who had been thrown from his seat, seemed on the point of being dashed to pieces. Its only occupant was a young and lovely girl, exquisitely dressed, and with a profusion of fair hair. Her eyes were wildly staring, her hands convulsively clutched the sides of the carriage. She appeared to be perfectly paralysed by fear, for though her face was of the hue of death, and betrayed the extreme of terror, she neither spoke nor screamed. As a vision her whole life, a life that did not count many years, was rising before her, as they say is the case with drowning people; and once again she saw the village home she had

deserted—the church where she had received her first communion—the father whose name she had dishonoured—the mother whose heart she had broken. Once again, with vivid distinctness, she saw the sweet cottage and garden, the simple little room, with roses and wood-bine coming in at the window, where she had dwelt so happily, ignorant of the great city of vice and of its dishonouring pleasures, to which, unknown to her parents, she had been seduced by love and vanity. Was this to be the end of her one year of gilded sin and hollow happiness? Oh! misery, to be crushed and maimed out of all form of loveliness—then death—judgment.

Lord Ballina knew this unhappy erring one by sight, for her history was not unknown in Parisian circles, and her fame had even reached Nice, where for a short time she had been a visitor. He had been interested in her fate, thinking she bore, which she did, a strong resemblance to Shelah, and she was but little older. He had also often observed how sad this girl looked, notwithstanding her showy position, while on her face still lingered an innocent expression, as though it were loth to forsake this fair exterior. The impressions left by a loving home and a virtuous bringing-up are hard to obliterate.

As the carriage, swerving from side to side, in fearful bounds, came close to Ballina, he at once determined to try to save its unfortunate occupant from the peril of her position. The horses stopped so suddenly, though they were still wildly kicking and plunging, gave him his chance, and he was quickened in his intentions by hearing the girl suddenly cry out, in agonising tones of entreaty, 'Mon père, mon père, pardonnez, sauvez moi, sauvez moi.'

No words could have spoken more directly to Ballina's heart than this appeal to an absent father's love; and gently murmuring, 'My Shelah, thank God it is not you,' he sprang forward, and, seizing the horses' heads in his strong muscular grasp, was battling with the infuriated animals, while at the same time he shouted to the occupant of the carriage to spring out. This she quickly did, and stood with wide-opened, terrified eyes watching the combat between Ballina and the chestnuts, who were kicking, rearing, plunging, doing their utmost to break loose again. But Ballina's excited blood was up, and, determined to be conqueror, to battle with these furious steeds was positive enjoyment to him in his present listless, depressed mood.

It seemed as if in the end he must be victori-

ous, when unfortunately, while still struggling at their heads, the pole of the carriage struck him a violent blow on the chest, he staggered, relaxed his hold of the horses, and in another instant they had broken loose, knocking the unfortunate Ballina down and trampling him beneath their feet, while the carriage went over his prostrate form as they again sped headlong forward on their wild, unguided career.

In an agony of grief, the girl flung herself down by his side, exhausting herself in cries for help. She feared he was dead, killed in rescuing her, and lifting his handsome head, which this cruel accident had left unscathed, on to her knees, she loosened his cravat, chafed his hands, and did all in her power to restore him to consciousness, while her tears fell fast on his still white face.

At last, to her infinite comfort, he slowly opened his eyes, and fixing them vaguely upon her, pronounced the one word, 'Shelah.' His thoughts had been completely absorbed by his daughter previous to the moment of the catastrophe that had laid him low, and now, by a natural sequence, on first recovering consciousness they again reverted to her. For a moment he imagined it was Shelah he had rescued from peril of death, and who now leaned

over him. But as the poor girl vehemently poured forth, in her own language, all her gratitude, for his having saved her life, and anxiously enquired if he was much hurt, the truth dawned upon him, and striving to raise himself he realised he was utterly powerless to do so, for the slightest movement occasioned him excruciating torture.

Then a creeping dread stole over him. Was this his death-warrant? was he destined never to see Shelah again? were the dread questions piercing through the dark mists obscuring his reasoning faculties and aiding to clear them. And, oh! God, what a future he had prepared for her! He would not, could not die until he had seen her once more, felt her arms round his neck, her kiss on his cheek—had implored her pardon for his marriage. But even in this supreme moment of bodily and mental anguish he did not belie his kindly nature. This girl for whom he had sacrificed his life had a father whom she still thought of and loved, for in the moment when probable death, in an awful form, faced her she had appealed to him for succour, craved his pardon, and Ballina, with a throb of triumph, reflected that, however useless his life had been, his death, sacrificed for this poor girl, might be the medium of restoring her to the path of

virtue, and to the arms of the father whose forgiveness she had implored. All these reflections passed like lightning through his mind, and with a strong effort he slightly raised himself, and, taking the girl's hand in his, said gaspingly in French, for his torture was every moment increasing,

'I have an only daughter—young, lovely as you are—pure, innocent as an angel, as you *once* were. I may never see that daughter again, for in saving your life something assures me here' —he placed his hand on his breast—'that I have sacrificed my own. In my daughter's name, I conjure you to forsake your present existence, and return to your father. Tell him what I say. He will forgive you for the sake of my child, whose father's life has been sacrificed in saving his daughter. Quick—quick—swear you will return to your true home, away—away from further temptation and from ultimate ruin.'

The girl, within whom the seeds of repentance and remorse had already been sown—who had never known true joy since she had deserted her home—sank on her knees, and, clasping her hands together, raised her eyes, swimming in tears, towards heaven as she exclaimed, solemnly,

'Je le jure! Mais monsieur si courageux, si

noble. Le bon Dieu est compatissant, il vous accordera la vie et le bonheur de revoir votre fille. Ah! comme je vais prier pour, qu'il exauce ma demande.'

As the girl spoke, a smile passed over Ballina's face, illuminating it into extraordinary beauty: then, overcome by the acuteness of his sufferings, he fell back insensible. Fortunately help was at hand, for at this moment two *gens-d'armes* made their appearance, and, having discovered his name and address on a card in his pocket, he was conveyed in a state of unconsciousness to his hotel.

CHAPTER V.

As the unfortunate Ballina was being carried upstairs to his apartments in the 'Hotel Bristol,' the most sumptuous Lady Ballina could engage, her carriage drove through the porte-côchere. She was returning from trying on her completed court costume, a marvel of artistic skill. Flushed and elated with the satisfactory result of her appearance in this becoming attire, and the prospect of her approaching presentation, which was still to take place,—as Lady Lillburne, unable to present her in consequence of the death of her father, had provided a substitute,—with her handsome and popular husband, once such a favourite in society, in attendance upon her, she was in unusual good temper and spirits.

If still undemonstrative in warmer tokens of affection, her husband appeared to have forgotten all cause of offence he had against 'his Dora,' and had become more attentive to her wishes since their arrival in Paris. The fact was, Lord Ballina had learnt to be more diplomatic in

his intercourse with his bride. Except in the most casual way, he never again alluded to the great bone of contention between them—his daughter. By so acting he hoped to allay her scarcely veiled ill-will towards Shelah, and to make everything work more smoothly hereafter for his child's peace and happiness.

As Lady Ballina descended from the carriage with great dignity, for she was beginning to assume very stately airs, she was considerably astonished at the absence of all the waiters; even the obsequious concierge was invisible. To be received with such scant ceremony was highly displeasing to her ladyship, and she angrily desired the courier, who was cumbered with many parcels, to seek for an explanation of such lack of attention and respect. But at this moment her maid, a woman of excitable emotions and small common-sense, rushed headlong down the stairs, and informed the unfortunate wife, in a few rapid and ill-considered words, that his lordship had met with a dreadful accident in saving the life of a lady who was driving in the Bois.

With a loud shriek, for Lady Ballina was unused to restrain her emotions, she tore her dress out of the weeping girl's grasp, and rushed up the stairs to her husband's room. Frantic with

grief, she stood by the bed where he lay, wholly unconscious of her presence, motionless as a figure of marble, in his perfect immobility looking more dignified and grander than he had ever looked in his life. The expression of his face was at once striking and beautiful, for it bore the impress of that noble, generous impulse which had actuated him to save a fellow-creature's life at the risk of his own.

An English doctor, hastily summoned, held a looking-glass to his lips as Lady Ballina entered the room. He looked up and said, gravely,

'He is not dead; he still breathes. Will you leave us for a few moments, Lady Ballina?'

Dazed, unable to realize the magnitude of the sudden misfortune threatening her, she passively obeyed. After a quick examination of Lord Ballina's injuries they recalled her, but only to annihilate any hope the wretched wife might have entertained. As gently as such information can be imparted, they informed her there was none. Her husband was doomed. He might, however, linger many days, might even rally sufficiently to know her, therefore it was imperative that, if there were any others dear to him he might wish to see—and he understood that his lordship had an only daughter—she should be at once summoned.

'Any dear to him!' As Lady Ballina heard these words they sank down into the very depths of her soul. 'Any dear to him!' Could there be one, ought there to be one so dear to him as herself? Was she not his wife? She had been married but a short time, and in her own jealous, passionate way adored this dying man. Was she, during the short space that life might be granted to him, to be thrust aside, simply tolerated? as would be the case when his daughter arrived to nurse him. His heart, she well knew, had never been hers. Even in the earliest days of their marriage, even in the very honeymoon, Shelah had been the cause of estrangement between them. And now, at the moment when he appeared to be softening towards her, he was leaving her for ever. By one fell blow both her ambitious hopes and her love were annihilated. No, a thousand times no; in these, his last moments, she must have him all to herself. And the doctor said he might rally, might perhaps live for some time longer; why then send for Shelah? In any case, she would wait. Excitement might kill him at once. She had such a possibility to consider, and surely was right in not immediately telegraphing for his daughter, as suggested by the doctor.

And the wretched woman, having come to

this conclusion, shut out all further thought of Shelah from her mind, and watched by her husband's side with a devotion not even his daughter could have surpassed, denying herself the necessary time for sleep and nourishment. At last, in an ecstasy of joy, she deemed her reward had come when, on the sixth day after his accident, Lord Ballina suddenly opened his eyes as she leant over his bed in despairing grief. Would he recognise her; speak some kindly word in acknowledgment of her devoted nursing? Suddenly, as though he did not see her, he called out, several times in succession, 'Shelah!' Lady Ballina sprang to her feet with a suppressed cry of fierce jealousy. His first thought on returning to consciousness was not for her! And as he continued to babble incoherent phrases without much meaning, but through which his daughter's name was ever intermingled, she covered her ears with her hands; she would not listen to these outpourings of parental love, choosing to consider they were the ravings of delirium, though she well knew these incoherent mutterings were the strongest proofs how thought of his daughter held possession of his troubled brain—how his wild ravings were an appeal for her presence near him.

When, finally exhausted by his efforts to

make himself understood, he became again wholly delirious, she flung herself on her knees by his bedside, exclaiming,

'Oh, Ballina, think of me—speak to me! I am your wife and love you as much as she does, and have a prior right to your love.' Bending over him as she spoke, she kissed him with impassioned vehemence, but he was silent again, and betrayed not the slightest consciousness of her presence. Bursting into tears she cried out, in the bitterness of her soul: 'Cold, cold to my embrace—to my love. But no colder than you have ever been!'

The doctor entering the room at this moment, she was forced into a show of calmness, and, rising from her knees, informed him that her husband had spoken, though he had not, she believed, recognised her.

'He will do so, I am convinced, Lady Ballina, but you must build no hopes on this. The case, I grieve to say, is hopeless. You have, of course, sent for Miss Fitz-Maurice, and by this time she ought to have arrived.'

The physician looked keenly into Lady Ballina's face as he spoke.

'Yes, she ought to have arrived,' she repeated, mechanically; she was not thinking of the value of her words or the meaning they implied, and

the physician, naturally believing she had done what was right, considered his responsibility ended, and said no more.

During the next two days, Lord Ballina remained in much the same condition; on the third, he became completely conscious, and was aware he was dying. Lady Ballina was close by at the moment, and looking up at her he said distinctly, and in a low hurried voice,

'Call Shelah quickly. She is here, I know, for I have seen her flitting about my bed.'

As he spoke, seeing death clearly written on her husband's face, the enormity of the crime she had committed in withholding from Shelah all knowledge of her father's accident and danger, and the terrible consequences that would most likely ensue from having done so, became apparent to her. That morning, only, had she telegraphed to Ireland for Shelah to start instantly for Paris, and even this tardy act of a positive duty was due to her own daughter, who arriving in Paris the previous day, and horrified at discovering that her mother had kept Shelah in ignorance of all that had occurred, sternly insisted on a telegram being immediately despatched to her, though assured by the physician that Miss Fitz-Maurice could not now arrive in time to see Lord Ballina alive.

And what answer could the wretched wife give her dying husband? Would he not turn from her with loathing, when made aware that it was she, the woman who professed to adore him, who had stricken him this terrible blow? Wild with conflicting emotions—repentant when it was too late—she madly wished she could undo her cruel work. What excuse could she now make to him that would in his eyes extenuate her conduct?

In the meanwhile, thinking she had left the room to fetch Shelah, whose face had haunted him during all his delirious wanderings, and who he imagined had been in attendance on him through all those dark hours of clouded intellect, Ballina closed his eyes. There was a smile on his face, and, believing he was alone, he began to speak softly to himself. Lady Ballina held her breath and leant over him. Would her name pass his lips? Would he reward her by some kindly expressions of affection for her untiring nursing and devotion? Would he be touched by it, and so allow his anger to be mitigated for what she had left undone? Alas! it was not of her he was thinking.

'Helen,' murmured the dying man. 'My beloved, unforgotten Helen. It has fared badly with me since you left me. I have gone astray

like a lost sheep. I have erred, deeply erred. But my life has not been wholly wasted. He who died for sinners will accept the sacrifice that is parting me from our child. Shelah, my brave Shelah, you will find comfort in the thought that, in yielding up my own life, I have saved that of another.'

The mention of his daughter's name seemed to rouse the father's drowsing faculties, for starting up in bed he called out,

'But where is she? Shelah, my heart's darling, why do you not come to your father's arms?' Then, observing his wife still in the room, he said, with feverish anxiety, 'She is not ill? You sent for her at once, did you not? Speak,' he exclaimed, seizing hold of her arm with dying strength, for her silence filled him with a dread suspicion. 'Is it only a dream of my imagination that she was here? Oh, woman!' he exclaimed, as Lady Ballina still remained tremblingly silent. 'Can you have been so inhuman as to have withheld from her all knowledge of my fate?'

'Ballina, Ballina, have mercy! Do not look at me so sternly,' exclaimed the unhappy woman, sinking down on her knees. 'I have had so little of your love, and I have so craved for it. I love you so deeply. I did not believe you

to be in the danger they said, and I wanted to have you all to myself. But Shelah has been telegraphed for to-day. Forgive me ! Forgive me !'

Lord Ballina, who had been staring at his wife with wild disbelief, thrust her from him with horror, as she ceased speaking, crying out,

'Oh ! jealousy more cruel than death. Such love as yours works like hate. Away ! away ! that a dying man may not curse you. Late, too late to see my cherished one again, whose life I have so darkened. Ah ! my punishment, if deserved, is very great,' moaned the unhappy father, as he sank back on his pillows, exhausted by the overwhelming catastrophe darkening his last moments.

But this crowning sorrow was not to be meted out to him, for in the adjoining room there was suddenly heard the sound of strange voices, a suppressed noise and confusion, and, the door opening, Adela Lawrence entered hastily, and coming up to her mother, who, ghastly pale and reaping the bitter fruits of her own misdoing, stood transfixed by her husband's bed-side, with his last terrible words ringing in her ears,—said, in a low hurried voice,

'Shelah has arrived, I am thankful to tell you ; break this news to Lord Ballina quickly.'

But the dying man had overheard Adela's whispered words, for the hearing of the dying is keen, and starting up, he exclaimed, loudly,

'She is here! Shelah! Shelah! Come to me, my darling!'

So loud and imploring was this cry that it penetrated to the adjoining room, where Shelah, Mr. Fitz-Maurice, and Bridget were waiting, and almost immediately the door flew open again, and Shelah, deathly pale, her large eyes widely dilated but perfectly tearless, stood on the threshold. As her father held his arms out towards her, she sprang forward, and in another moment her head rested on his breast. For a few moments father and daughter remained locked in a silent embrace. Speech was equally impossible to them both in this instant of most sad reunion.

Sullenly Lady Ballina looked on. This then was the end of all her scheming! No sense of gratitude that the daughter had arrived in time to see her dying father found place in her heart. Shelah's unexpected advent would not restore the life ebbing fast away, and with it her dream of love and all her worldly aspirations. And could she ever forget the expression of her husband's countenance as he last looked at her? Now she would be shut out from his room

entirely. Everyone would be against her, everyone in favour of the injured daughter, while the man whom she loved with such passionate adoration had thrust her from him as something abhorrent in his sight.

The pain and anguish of jealous love was so intense that, unable to control her feelings, she came to Shelah, and, touching her on the shoulder, said, in a low hard voice,

'You must be careful, you are agitating your father.'

The girl shrank from her touch, and looking up, replied, steadily, 'Have no fear, he is my father; we understand each other.'

'Dora,' faintly spoke Lord Ballina. 'You have left us but a short space for an eternal farewell. But, as I see my child once more, I forgive you, as I hope to be forgiven. Be gentle to her in the future, for the love you say you bear me; but leave us now for awhile, I wish to be alone with Shelah.'

Conscience-stricken, in sullen sorrow, with a feeling of stronger hatred for her step-daughter than she had ever before harboured, Lady Ballina fell back and quitted the room. As she reached the door, Shelah looked towards her, saying with a generous intention, notwithstanding it included deep reproach,

'If he asks for you, I will not be so cruel as you have been to me, I will call you.'

As the door closed upon Lady Ballina, Shelah laid her head down on her father's pillow, and taking his hand in hers placed it to her lips. She gave no vent to any outward expression of her grief. He knew what she was suffering; why aggravate his sorrow at this supreme moment of an eternal parting? There would be time enough for despairing tears hereafter. He was dying, every second was precious.

'How did you know?' he whispered, faintly.

'Father, dear father, I felt it all in my heart. Your long silence frightened me; and when a report of your accident reached us I did not wait a moment.'

She did not allude to the Banshee's cry that had caused her hasty journey, for she remembered how he had ever shrunk from mention of that name.

'Thank God you did not wait,' he murmured. 'But do you know what occasioned my accident, my sweet child?'

He smiled slightly, pleased with the reflection she would receive some comfort from knowing what had occasioned his fatal accident.

'Yes, yes, my dear, brave father, I do know; for, as we arrived at the hotel, the young lady

whose life you had saved rushed forward and bid me tell you her father had come to take her home; and she would never forget the promise she had made you, and that she prayed for you night and day.'

'Shelah, my darling, these are precious words to me. I cannot explain their full meaning; but let us together thank God that I have been permitted to accomplish one action in my life worth recording before heaven. My beloved child, be brave, be patient as you have been, until Hugh's return. To his guardianship I have committed you.'

Poor Ballina's strength, feverishly upheld by his daughter's arrival, was ebbing fast away, his breathing rapidly becoming quicker and weaker; but, gathering up all his energies in one supreme effort of parental love, he stretched his arms over his beloved daughter, saying,

'You have been the best child a father ever possessed. We have been very happy together, have we not?' he added, pathetically. 'Ah, would that I had never married again!'

'Oh! father, happier than any child has ever been. How can I live without you?' she wailed, piteously, forgetful of all the misery and anxiety of the past years, remembering only the great mutual love that had united them so close-

ly through all their troubles, and now to be severed for ever. 'And everything you did was for my welfare,' she added. 'Let no thought of your marriage trouble you now.'

'Always my consoler,' he murmured, then suddenly cried out, 'Where are you, my child? I cannot see you.'

'Here, father, here close to you,' she exclaimed, placing her arms round his neck, and laying her cheek close to his.

'God bless my child,' he faintly whispered.

A great stillness reigned throughout the room for an instant; then Shelah, with an icy dread at her heart, murmured softly,

'Father—father. Oh! take me with you, take me with you.'

No response was given to her heart-broken appeal, and that silence revealed to Shelah that she was alone in the world. She made no outcry when convinced of the truth, but with her arms still round her father's neck, her face pressed close to his, fainted away.

And thus, clasped in each other's arms, did Lady Ballina find them when, a few minutes later alarmed by the deathly silence, and at receiving no summons, she entered the room.

CHAPTER VI.

IMMEDIATELY on hearing of Lord Ballina's untimely death, Lord Lillburne's thoughts reverted to Shelah, and, assured she must be in sore need of a friend, he determined to start at once for Paris. He hoped Mabel would volunteer to accompany him, as she always expressed a deep interest in Shelah; but the office of consoler was not in Lady Lillburne's line, and she was much occupied at the moment in redecorating her drawing-rooms, for her husband had stated his intention of allowing her to spend the season following, when her mourning would be over, in London, and, with a heart buried in the rubbish of the world, she had no time to spare for the desolate orphan. She was as much annoyed, however, as Lord Lillburne was pleased to find that Captain Thornton, at his own request, was accompanying her husband to Paris, and thus displaying an interest in Shelah which greatly disturbed her.

For a few days after her father's death, Shelah was dangerously ill from a return of those alarming attacks of partial insensibility she had been subject to in her childhood. But when she heard Lady Ballina proposed leaving her in Paris under Bridget's care, when she left for Ireland, she made a superhuman and successful effort to conquer her nervous illness, and expressed a firm intention of accompanying the mournful *cortége* to Ireland, where her father's funeral was to take place. By his own desire he was to be laid in the village churchyard by the side of his beloved Helen. Backed as Shelah's wishes were by Lord Lillburne's complete approbation, Lady Ballina sullenly gave in to what she could not avoid, and Shelah, looking but a shadow of her former self, started with her step-mother on her sad journey back to Ballina.

Fortunately for her, Lord Lillburne and Captain Thornton, accompanied them on their homeward route, and vied with each other in their silent, sympathetic devotion to the sorrowful girl. We pass over her agony of grief on arriving at the home she would never again share with her father. Shelah had come to those waters of Marah we must all partake of sooner or later, and she found them bitter exceedingly. The sad ceremony over, she secluded

herself almost entirely in her own room, and in loneliness of grief awaited what trials fate might yet have in store for her. This she soon learned.

Lord Lillburne and Captain Thornton had left immediately after the funeral, and about three weeks after their departure, and, when Shelah's health was to a certain extent re-established, Lady Ballina sent for her, and coldly announced her intention of leaving Ireland in a few days, as nothing would ever induce her to reside any longer in so desolate a corner of the world as she now found herself in, where she declared it rained incessantly, and where the inhabitants were but slightly removed from savages.

The colour rushed into Shelah's pale face as she heard these unflattering remarks passed on her beloved country, and her heart sank at the prospect of leaving Ballina. But she knew she must submit to her step-mother's will for the present; and, having quietly enquired what day she had decided on for their departure, left the room to give way to her grief in privacy.

To Lady Ballina's material mind, there was not the slightest beauty discernible in the place so loved by Shelah. The sight of a bog, the former Mrs. Brown declared, made her feel ill. Then she had had carefully impressed upon her, by that 'odious Bridget,' the legend

of the Banshee, and been told how truthfully this unearthly being had foretold the deaths of both the late Lord and Lady Ballina, and, death being a gloomy certainty, she did not care to think much about it in the present weak state of her nervous system; she had a morbid horror, as she lay awake at night, listening to the howling wind, of hearing that unearthly shriek foretell her own coming demise.

'As if the Banshee would trouble the likes of her,' was Bridget's contemptuous remark to Mick, respecting Lady Ballina's fears on this subject. Be this as it may, Lady Ballina declared she had never felt well since she had been in Ireland, and was determined to leave it with all convenient despatch.

Though by his will, made immediately after his second marriage, Lord Ballina had endorsed Helen's desire that Hugh Carmichael should, in case of his own death, become Shelah's guardian, until his return from the Crimea, there could be no alternative but that she should reside with her step-mother and under her care. It had evidently never occurred to poor, thoughtless Ballina that, even when Hugh did return from the Crimea, he was too young a man for Shelah to find a home under his roof. That she would do so Shelah never for one moment doubted,

and it was this prospect that, to a certain extent, made her more resigned to present circumstances.

As to Shelah's inheritance, it was a kingdom without a revenue to which she had succeeded, for when the interest of the mortgages on the estate, now held by Lady Ballina, was paid, the margin left was so insignificant that it was hardly adequate for Shelah's bare requirements, much less to keep her estate in proper order. Practically speaking, it belonged to her step-mother, while, from the aspect of Irish affairs, poor Queen Shelah might at any moment find herself penniless.

All these unpleasant facts were made known to her in hard, cold terms by Lady Ballina, and, weakened by sorrow and illness, Shelah's brave spirit quailed before the dreary prospect. Then came a letter from Hugh, and she revived.

Lady Ballina's aversion to her step-daughter could hardly be concealed, it had indeed increased since the event that had made her a widow; for she could not forget that, in order to be alone with his daughter in his last moments, she had been banished from her husband's side. To be a pensioner on the bounty of one who had so injured her, and disliked her all the more from the consciousness of having done so, was so

distressing to Shelah that, in the first instance, she implored her uncle to allow her to live with him. But Mr. Fitz-Maurice was a man of acute foresight, and, in Shelah's interest, looked gravely ahead of the present, and represented to the unhappy girl that, for her own sake, she must remain with her step-mother, who had now everything in her power, and might at any time force the sale of the Ballina estates of which she remained the sole mortgagee, having refused Colonel Carmichael's proposal to take upon himself the mortgage, in order that he might hold the estate in trust during his ward's minority. This was a terrible disappointment to Hugh, and was Lady Ballina's first triumph over him who had made such strenuous efforts to prevent her marriage.

When Colonel Carmichael received the announcement of his friend's death and Shelah's illness, his first thought was to apply for immediate leave. But duty was ever paramount with him, and, though distracted by the thought of her desolate position, on calmer reflection he realized how impossible it was for him to desert his post. Sebastopol was still in the hands of the Russians—the campaign might be protracted for months. In the high position he held, he must be an example to others.

Private trouble and sorrow ought to be a secondary consideration. Queen and country must come first, and when a few weeks later he found himself foremost in the taking of the Redan, so long a thorn in the side of the allies, he reaped his reward. But he had also received another shortly before, in the shape of a letter from her who was now his ward. In this letter she assured him she had quite recovered her health.

'You are a soldier,' she wrote, 'and I must not interfere with your life. I trust in you perfectly and entirely—when you can come to me, I know you will. Henceforth, I shall be guided by you in all my actions. You tell me, as well as Uncle Fitz-Maurice, that I had better remain with Lady Ballina, and of course I submit.'

Such a letter relieved him from much anxiety. Had he seen and known Shelah's exact position, he might have felt differently. As it was, he was comforted by the assurance that her brave spirit had not deserted her, notwithstanding the unfortunate position into which she was plunged by her father's untimely death. She had, however, one firm friend who did not fail her in the hour of affliction, this was Lord Lillburne whose interest in her never flagged, and, hearing Lady Ballina had no intention of living in Ireland, proposed to her that she should, for a year or

two, take a place to be let in his neighbourhood. She eagerly accepted this offer. To be in the immediate proximity of Lady Lillburne was precisely what she most wished.

To Shelah, since they were not to remain in Ireland, all places were alike. She was glad, however, to find they were not to settle in London, for to her cities had no charm. Then, to her infinite relief, she learnt that Bridget was to accompany her, for she had anticipated Lady Ballina would have endeavoured to prevent this. But one of the stipulations in her father's will had provided against such a catastrophe being possible: they were never to be separated except by mutual consent.

Nothing had aggravated Lady Ballina more than this stipulation, and, by every slight and humiliation she could devise, she endeavoured to force this faithful servant to give warning. But, as Bridget herself confidentially observed to Mick, she might as well try to move Nelson's monument in Sackville Street. Every insult to herself or to her nationality was received by Bridget with imperturbable calm. Sometimes she would make believe to misunderstand these insulting remarks, and smile and curtsey, as though she had been complimented by Lady Ballina. At others, she pretended to be hard

of hearing, and would beg her ladyship to be 'koind enough' to repeat what she had said, driving her ladyship to the verge of fury. Never but once did Bridget lose her habitual self-command and retort on her persecutor. This was in defence of Mick, with whom, in face of the common enemy, she had become firm friends. Even in their most acrimonious bickerings theirs had been but surface quarrels.

The fisherman had brought up a basket of splendid silvery trout as a gift for Shelah, and, Bridget having enticed the sorrow-stricken girl on to the terrace to view his present, she lingered for a few moments to watch the setting sun, and to speak some kind words to her old friend Mick. At this moment, Lady Ballina suddenly appeared, and with a look of supreme disgust, directed at Mick, haughtily ordered Bridget to send that uncouth savage off the premises.

'Is it a savage ye call his dead lordship's faithful sarvint, that saved Miss Shelah from a watery grave?' blurted out Bridget, indignantly. 'It's not the coat that makes the gintleman, nor the foin clothes that makes the lady, but the heart that beats beneath them, me lady!'

'Hush! hush, dear Bridget,' said Shelah. 'Lady Ballina is new to everything here. You must not be disrespectful.'

'Bedad! Maybe her ladyship's afeard I'm a cannibal, Queen Shelah. But they bide on the islands, me lady. And it's many a time I've seen them with me own eyes,' said Mick, with a humorous twinkle in his eye, as he shouldered his basket of fish, and made for the kitchen. But, when he had gone a few paces, he stopped and looked back at Shelah, saying, sorrowfully, 'It's very pale ye look, queen, and it's to-morrow ye'r laving us. I have the boat ready, and there's a nice breeze up; a bit of a sail will blow the roses back in yer cheeks.' He wiped the cuff of his coat across his eyes as he spoke.

But Shelah shook her head. She well knew, whatever plan she might make, her step-mother was certain to contravene. And she had already learnt that by perfect obedience on her side, peace could alone reign between them.

Though death had robbed Lady Ballina of a husband, she had one consolation: it could not erase her name from the peerage. But, notwithstanding so supporting a thought, she undoubtedly deeply lamented his loss. The gay dresses, costly ornaments she had had such supreme pleasure in procuring, with a view to making her first appearance in London society with proper *éclat*, had to be replaced by a widow's sable garments of woe. And when she

did appear in society, an event she never lost sight of notwithstanding her grief, it would be without the support of her handsome husband's presence. How the great sorrows and disappointments of this chequered existence are borne is the truest test of character. The nobler nature is invariably exalted and purified by misfortune; the lower and meaner is almost certain to be soured and embittered. The latter was Lady Ballina's case. Her passionate love for her husband had been a very material affection. Struck at first sight with admiration of his manly beauty of face and form, his courteous manners, gay humours, she had taken fire quickly and impulsively. His disposition and character she had never studied. She knew he was a gambler, but this fact had not damped the ardour of her pursuit, for she had some latent idea that he was too honourable a man to dissipate her fortune. But she had never fathomed the brighter side of his frank, generous nature; and the pathos of his deep attachment for his daughter had only been the cause of her unreasoning resentment —a feeling that survived his death. She even resented the sight of Shelah's patient, silent grief for her father's loss; and had determined, on arriving in England, to send her to some finishing school, so that she might not be constantly

reminded of the unrepented wrong she had done her. But when she expressed this intention to Shelah, who had hitherto been most submissive and gentle, her surprise was unbounded when she said, calmly and decisively,

'Colonel Carmichael is my guardian. He will decide what is best for me. And I feel sure he will not approve of my ever going to school, for my darling father would never have allowed it.' Here, covering her face with her hands, she burst into tears.

'Your father spoilt you,' harshly responded Lady Ballina. 'And what is your grief to mine? Have you lost what I have?'

'A thousand times more,' passionately exclaimed Shelah. 'You only lived with him for a few weeks, I my whole life. And, had you loved him as I loved him, you could never have acted as you did. Had you been absent and he called for you, I would have worked heaven and earth to hasten your arrival, would have given up to you the sad joy of nursing him, and remained content to lie at his door and listen to his loved voice. Oh, father, father, why were you taken from me?' cried out the girl, wringing her hands in an uncontrollable burst of anguish.

For a moment Lady Ballina was completely

cowed. She did not care to be reminded of her husband's last moments, of the expression on his face as it was turned towards her for the last time, and she silently left the room.

The subject of Shelah's going to school was, however, never again reverted to, for Hugh placed an imperative veto upon such a proceeding; and, by his instructions, a finishing governess was engaged for his ward—a highly-educated woman, who, with little heart but considerable tact and diplomacy, always contrived to stand on neutral ground between Lady Ballina and her step-daughter. But as she taught well—and Shelah was most anxious to improve in various branches of learning in which she was deficient, owing to her desultory education, before Hugh's return from the Crimea—she was indifferent whether her governess was her ally or Lady Ballina's, and in Adela Lawrence she always found a firm and constant friend.

Perhaps Adela reproached herself for the part she had taken in aiding her mother's marriage with Lord Ballina. Certainly she deeply regretted that she had concealed his accident in Paris from Shelah, and had expressed such strong disapprobation of her conduct on this subject that, for some time afterwards, there had been a considerable coolness between

mother and daughter. But the breach between them had been healed when, a few months after Lord Ballina's death, Adela succumbed to her long sufferings. After her death, the clouds gathered thicker round Shelah; for, unsustained by any of the consolations of religion, her step-mother rebelled against this fresh blow. It had no softening influence over her, and, unrestrained by Adela's sage counsels, the violence of her temper increased daily, and as Shelah became better acquainted with Lady Ballina's character she often felt positively thankful her father was not alive, for how could he, with his refined nature, have endured an existence of such constant humiliation as his would have been? She herself bore every act of her step-mother's petty tyranny uncomplainingly, and with marvellous patience; for, oh! glorious perspective, when Hugh returned her present uncongenial life would terminate.

CHAPTER VII.

THE auspicious moment so ardently anticipated by Shelah has at last arrived. Two years have elapsed since her father's death, and, though his cherished memory is still green in her faithful heart, Time, kindly and only healer of sorrow, has softened and mellowed hers. To-day she is actually joyous. The war is over, with triumph to the allied troops. Whether to be followed by any practical results hereafter, Shelah cares not; Hugh is safe—is in England. He has made a name for himself; what does all this matter to her?

The Guards have made their triumphal entry into London, and received the merited ovation of their brave deeds. Other regiments have equally earned their laurels. Foremost amongst these is Hugh's, of which he is now colonel. They have landed but that morning at Portsmouth, and a telegram has announced to Shelah she is to expect him that afternoon. It is a

bright and sunny day. She is dressed suitably for the season in cloudy white muslin, with a few pale, pink roses fastened in her bodice.

Her whole being is so full of gladness, she hardly knows how to contain herself. With beating pulses and impatient expectancy she awaits Hugh's arrival as she sits, in perfect idleness, in the front drawing-room of Lady Ballina's mansion in Grosvenor Place, a room that testifies to great wealth and slight taste. The owner of this grand mansion has not yet fully entered into society, but the purchase of it has been made preparatory to her own *début*, and that of her step-daughter's, the ensuing season; for Lady Ballina is quite sharp enough to be aware that, with so lovely a girl as Shelah by her side, she is certain to be received with open arms by the exclusive set wherein she has long sought to gain admittance, and amongst whom her husband was once so popular a member.

His tragic death, following so closely on his sudden marriage, had revived the memory of the brilliant Irishman who, from having been so long an exile from these magic circles, had, to a certain extent, been forgotten; and there are many old friends quite prepared to hold out a protecting hand to his young daughter, the renown of whose beauty has already been

heralded by Captain Thornton far and wide. Numerous and various are the reports afloat respecting Lady Ballina. By some it is averred she is the daughter of an Irish cattle-dealer; others declare they know for certain that she had been a washerwoman; others assert she was a Begum, and had lived many months in the harem of an Eastern potentate, etc. That she is fabulously wealthy is a certainty, and speculations are rife as to whether these riches are to be inherited by Miss Fitz-Maurice, who, although she has only been seen once or twice in public, already forms a subject of much conversation and considerable speculation, a fact of which Shelah is in blissful ignorance. That she is a girl of unusual beauty, and of a beauty most uncommon, all must allow, though Lady Ballina emphatically declares that such dark eyes as her step-daughter's, contrasted with such fair hair, impress her disagreeably.

That they have quite a contrary effect on the young man now sitting in her ladyship's drawing-room, and aiding Shelah to arrange a large hamper of roses in water, is very evident; for whatever she does, or wherever she moves, his appreciative glances follow this fair young girl, who is singularly graceful in her movements, everywhere. Simply as she is attired she

wears one costly ornament, and this is a diamond and ruby butterfly fastening the collar of her white gown. Occasionally as she flits about the room, for she appears incapable of remaining still for a single moment, she touches the butterfly mechanically with her slender fingers, as though to be certain it is safely placed, while every now and again she darts like a bird on to the balcony, and, craning her pretty neck over the balustrades, looks eagerly up and down Grosvenor Place.

'Anne, sister Anne, dost thou see anyone coming?' mockingly calls out her companion from within.

'Nothing that I care to see,' replies Shelah, disconsolately, as she stands on the sill of the open window. 'Oh! Captain Thornton, this is the longest afternoon I ever remember. It seems as though it would never end.'

'Not a complimentary remark to me, Miss Fitz-Maurice, though very much so to the gallant colonel you are so anxiously expecting. Then he is a hero—I confess I am getting somewhat weary both of the Crimea and conquering heroes. There seems to be no other topic of conversation. We humbler mortals are quite at a discount.'

'Pure envy, sir, and envy is an odious pas-

sion,' replied Shelah, with pretty severity. 'It is not only because he is a hero that I am so longing to see Hugh. He is my guardian, remember. Stands to me in the place of my beloved father.' A cloud of sadness passed over her mobile countenance as she added, softly, 'He had such trust in him, I have every reason for loving Hugh; and I love him with my whole heart and soul,' she added, with enthusiasm.

'Captain Carmichael is a very fortunate man,' observed Dick, pensively.

'And I am a still more fortunate girl. For, when he is settled in his new home, I am going to keep house for him. Think of what that means to me! It is almost too delightful to be true.'

'How old is Captain Carmichael?' asked the young man, drily.

'Oh! I don't know exactly. Much older than I am. A great deal older than you,' she replied, carelessly. 'But what o'clock is it, Captain Thornton? Surely it must be six.'

'Half-an-hour yet before your hero's train is so much as due,' he answered, a little spitefully. 'But, as you consider me so venerable, allow me to give you a moral lesson. Time,' he continued, solemnly, 'passes with swifter pace when we are occupied, Miss Fitz-Maurice. Are you

not ashamed of your idleness? There should be a division of labour. I am quite exhausted arranging these flowers, and this abominable basket still overflows.'

'The idea of calling it labour to arrange flowers. It is a privilege,' she exclaimed, indignantly, as she picked up a rose and pressed it to her lips. 'Oh! Captain Thornton, how I love these roses, for they come from Ballina, and how I hate London and everything in it, except you and Lord Lillburne.'

'I am glad you except me from your universal hatred of all that London contains; but wait until next year, when you are launched into the whirlpool of society, and you will speak very differently. I only trust you will not then cut poor Dick Thornton altogether.'

'Am I ever likely to forget how kind you have been to me this winter? How you saved my poor pussy's life when my step-mother ordered it to be drowned on account of the pheasants. I don't know what I should have done had it not been for you and dear Lord Lillburne. How changed he is! My darling father has often told me he was one of the most violent-tempered men he ever knew. Yet from the first I never felt afraid of him.'

'And Lady Lillburne. Do you like her?'

asked Dick, in a hurried, nervous manner. 'She seems so fond of you.'

Shelah was aware that Captain Thornton and Lady Lillburne were great friends, and hesitated before answering; but her truthfulness was unswerving, and she replied, diffidently,

'I may be prejudiced, but, though I have tried to do so, I cannot like her very much; I always feel we have nothing in common! But your alluding to her reminds me she gave me a letter yesterday to give you. Pray forgive me for having forgotten to do so until now.'

She drew a pretty scented note from her pocket and gave it to him. The colour rushed into the young man's face, and a shade of annoyance passed over it as he replied,

'Thank you, Miss Fitz-Maurice, but in future, if Lady Lillburne wishes to make use of you as a carrier, you can tell her that the Post Office is a more expeditious mode of conveyance for her correspondence, and certainly safer,' he added, drily.

'That is a covert reproach for my carelessness. But you must forgive me, my mind is so pre-occupied with the thought of once more seeing my guardian that it makes me oblivious of everything.'

'Colonel Carmichael is a very fortunate man,

Miss Fitz-Maurice,' replied Captain Thornton, as he absently broke the seal of Lady Lillburne's note. 'My words were not intended to convey the slightest reproach, I can assure you,' he added, in a voice of so much sadness that Shelah looked at him in surprise.

But immediately her thoughts were diverted into another channel by the sound of a cab rattling up to the door, followed by a loud impatient ringing of the door-bell. Dropping the rose she held in her hand, with one bound she rushed to the window and was out on the balcony. Unnoticed the note Dick still held fell from his grasp, as with a quick movement, as though he were committing a theft, he stooped and picked up the rose Shelah had dropped; pressed it to his lips, and then hastily thrust it inside the breast of his coat. At the same moment a gust of wind from the open window blew Lady Lillburne's note to the other side of the room, unnoticed by Dick, whose gaze was fixed on Shelah, who had re-entered the room with an expression on her face he had never witnessed before. She was positively transfigured by the realisation of her long-anticipated joy.

Usually perhaps a little too pale, her face now glowed with that brilliant colour great excitement raises, her eyes sparkled with the intensity

of her happiness. One hand was pressed tightly to her bosom, as though to stay the wild pulsations of her happy heart, the other held back the long curls shading her cheeks, while her lips, slightly parted, displayed the pretty pearly teeth they enclosed.

She was listening with eager intensity for a step long unheard, but oh! so eagerly desired. Her whole attitude was the expression of one almost unable to believe in the truth of her own felicity. Dick, who could hear the quick breathing caused by her great excitement, gazed at her in speechless admiration.

'He is come,' she said at last, in a low voice of intense joy. 'He is here!' she exclaimed, coming slowly a few steps forward as the door flew open and, unannounced, Colonel Carmichael entered the room.

For an instant they both remained looking at each other in speechless astonishment. When Hugh had parted from Shelah she was hardly more than a child, now she was a woman, and a most lovely one. He also was changed, for he had a luxuriant beard, and was deeply bronzed by exposure to all weathers. As, recovering from the immediate surprise caused by the unexpected change in his ward from unformed girlhood into the sweetest type of womanhood, he ad-

vanced with outstretched hands towards her, she sprang forward and grasped them in hers, exclaiming, with tears in her eyes,

'At last! at last!'

Some strange, newly-arisen shyness checked her first impulse which had been to fling her arms round Hugh's neck, and lay her head on his shoulder, as she had so often done, whilst he, recognising her childhood was past, and therefore that he had lost the sweet privileges it accorded, stooped down—for tall as she now was he towered above her—and kissed her smooth, white forehead, saying, with tremulous emotion,

'Can this be Shelah?'

CHAPTER VIII.

Conscious that such a meeting as Shelah's and Colonel Carmichael's demanded no witness, Dick stole discreetly from the room. For a few moments he remained on the landing plunged in moody reflection. A paradise of bliss had been within his reach, and he had failed to grasp it through too great self-confidence and youthful vanity, and now something whispered it was lost to him for ever. To account for his present state of feelings, we must revert to events long since past.

Thrown by circumstances, certainly not of his own seeking, into the constant society of a beautiful and fascinating woman many years older than himself, she had gradually, and before he became fully aware of it, attained a great influence over him, until imperceptibly he became a complete slave to her humours and caprices, and she, at once pleased, amused, and jealous of her power over the young man, used all her arts

to increase that power. Her fatal sway over Dick in no way interfered either with the esteem or gratitude he entertained for Lord Lillburne, whose liking for him never flagged, and who, in view of the union he wished to promote between Shelah and his heir—a project he believed his wife encouraged—never harboured the slightest jealousy of Dick Thornton's attentions to Mabel, and thus the triangular friendship commenced at Nice remained unbroken, as long as Lady Lillburne saw no immediate prospect of Shelah entering the lists as her rival.

Captain Thornton was constantly running backwards and forwards between London and Lillburne Castle, and was always greeted with equal cordiality by host and hostess. He and Lord Lillburne spent long days together on the moors; the evenings were devoted to music, for Dick had a fine voice, and sang duets with Shelah, to the infinite satisfaction of Lord Lillburne, if not of Mabel, whose jealousy of the young girl was ever on the alert. For the place Lady Ballina had hired was in such close vicinity to Lillburne Castle that she and Shelah were constant visitors there.

In the meanwhile, Mabel, to her husband's great satisfaction, appeared perfectly contented in the retirement of the country, while he, ob-

serving this, became more and more considerate and gentle in all his dealings with her, though in the depth of his heart he often sighed to observe how she still clung with eager excitement to the dissipations and frivolities of those London seasons that were to him so utterly distasteful, but with which he had promised not to interfere. He was determined to be patient with all the perversities of Mabel's character, and so act as to fulfil her father's dying request. He had a great interest himself in watching the development of Shelah's character. It was strange what an influence for good she possessed over this peculiar man; for, fearful of losing an atom of the affection and respect she accorded him since his kindness to her at the time of her father's death, he was on his guard against every outbreak of his quickly-roused temper.

Thus time glided smoothly and uneventfully onwards for all the actors in this story, until a circumstance occurred that materially disturbed the peace of mind of one amongst them. There is nothing more certain than that the world encourages much that at the same time it disapproves and condemns. Though Lady Lillburne and Captain Thornton were always invited to meet each other wherever society gathered, there were very few who did not make ill-

natured comments on their friendship and great intimacy. Of course those whom it most concerns are the last to hear these remarks. But Dick had an excellent mother, whose notions of what was right and fitting belonged to an older school of morality than the present. Nevertheless, she possessed numerous friends who moved in the vortex of society, and who considered it their positive duty to enlighten her respecting the something more than gossip that the intimacy between her handsome son and Lady Lillburne had raised, warning her at the same time that Lady Lillburne was a vain and dangerous coquette, whose goings on had in the past given that unfortunate Lord Lillburne much anxiety, though in the present instance he was evidently blinded, by his own infatuation for Captain Thornton, to what was patent to others.

With outward calmness Mrs. Thornton listened to the unpleasant revelation communicated to her in the interest of her dear son by her kind friend, and, having flatly declared her disbelief of what she had imparted, did what a more worldly-wise mother would not have done without profounder consideration—repeated everything she had heard to Dick, and, with tears in her eyes, implored him to give up his intimacy with Lady Lillburne.

As he listened to his mother's advice, and heard all she had to say, he turned pale with indignation that anyone should have dared to couple Lady Lillburne's name with his to the discredit of either, and assuring his mother there was not a shadow of foundation for the gossip retailed to her, refused to discuss the subject any further. Nevertheless, from this moment his mind was troubled with doubts; for, as he examined his own heart more closely, he could not but acknowledge that he had found perhaps too subtle a pleasure in Mabel's society, that his feelings for her were not those he should entertain for the wife of another man, and that man one who had dealt him out no common meed of kindness. But then came the tempter's insidious whisper, urging, in extenuation of his weakness, that circumstances out of his own control, unsought for by him, had thrust him into his present position and into overwhelming temptation. And, after all, was his danger so great? His friendship for Lady Lillburne had never passed the bounds of harmless flirtation—a strong mutual sympathy. There was nothing dishonouring to either in this pleasant association. Such friendships were common in society. His honour was and should ever remain stainless. Thus, giving ear to these encouragements to evil emanating from the

father of lies, Dick Thornton quieted for a short space the gentle whispers of accusing conscience that occasionally disturbed him after the discovery he had made, and pursued his usual course, though he certainly became more careful in public in his attentions. But conscience was aroused with stinging force, nor was he quite so assured of the stainlessness of his honour when one day, placing his hand on his shoulder, Lord Lillburne said, with cordial kindness,

'Dick, my dear boy, it gives me the greatest pleasure to witness the good fellowship existing between you and Shelah. There are no two people I should like better to fill my place here than you and the daughter of the only true friend I ever possessed.' Noticing the deep flush suffusing the young man's face, he added, with a smile, 'Of course, she is rather too young just yet to have her mind disturbed by dreams of love or matrimony, and I know I can trust to your honour not to ruffle the sweet serenity of her virgin heart just yet. Ah, Dick, you will be indeed a lucky man if hereafter you win Shelah's affections.'

As the word 'honour' passed Lord Lillburne's lips, Dick started, self-accused. His honour! What man does not feel stirred when this is appealed to. And for a moment the misguided

young man was prompted to throw himself on Lord Lillburne's generosity, and acknowledge to him his unfortunate infatuation, for he had not yet passed those boundaries that must make a husband's forgiveness impossible. Yes, he would do this, and at the same time declare his intention of at once joining some regiment ordered on foreign service, and, by so doing, effectually rend asunder the chain of his miserable weakness. But unfortunately our noblest and best resolves, unbacked by a cry for higher aid to support them, hang upon threads slender as those a spider weaves; and as Dick, red and confused, was debating in what words to frame his confession, and Lord Lillburne, wholly mistaking the origin of his evident confusion, was maliciously smiling at his perturbed countenance, Mabel entered the room, and all Captain Thornton's nobler resolutions vanished into empty space. For, observing his agitated countenance, she glanced nervously first at her husband and then at him, while an expression of fear flitted across her lovely face, an emotion he had often witnessed there when she unexpectedly found herself in her husband's presence, and which he attributed to the terror with which she declared he still inspired her, more or less, at all times.

She now fixed her blue eyes imploringly on him, and he, quickly recalling to memory all the exaggerated confidences she had made him respecting Lord Lillburne's jealousy and violence in the past, her unabated doubts, notwithstanding his apparent reformation, of his complete sanity, decided that, with a man of such uncertain temperament, the confidence he had on the better impulse of the moment thought of making could only lead to results perhaps most disastrous to Lady Lillburne. And had he not, prior to every personal consideration, her domestic peace to take into account? Thus, with futile and deceptive reasoning, Dick Thornton committed the fatal error of temporising with his nobler intentions, and his good resolutions dropped to the ground without bearing fruit, the world continuing to gossip about him and Lady Lillburne. But if Thornton, weak and irresolute while still fatally bound by the spell of Mabel's fascination, deeply erred, he was proportionally punished; for, as we arrive at the moment when he stands outside the door where Shelah and Colonel Carmichael are happily conversing, Lady Lillburne's power over him was broken for ever, while it had been replaced by a deep and passionate love for Shelah,—a love the seeds of which had unconsciously been sown

in his heart long ago in Nice, and had been silently growing there ever since. She, however, remained wholly unconscious of this fact, and treated him with an innocent familiarity, an affectionate friendship that was most exasperating. And yet it was this fresh and wholesome affection, hopeless from many circumstances as it appeared to be, that helped to keep him in England.

A rippling, joyous laugh he well knew, proceeding from the drawing-room, roused him from his heart-burning reflections, and hastened his departure. In the hall he met Lady Ballina coming in from her late drive in the Park. For reasons of her own she was always gracious to Captain Thornton, though his dislike and distrust of her suave words and honied smiles was hardly concealed. He now simply bowed, as he said abruptly, from a generous desire that Shelah's happiness should not be too quickly intruded upon by her step-mother's presence,

'Colonel Carmichael has arrived, they are in the drawing-room. I felt I was one too many, they must have so much to say to each other. I hope, Lady Ballina, you will not disturb this happy meeting.'

Lady Ballina would have resented this rather imperative request, given in her own house, from

any other person than the speaker. As it was, she was rather ruffled, but, controlling all expression of temper, replied, banteringly,

'I am not a marplot, Captain Thornton. I will allow due time for the outpourings of my step-daughter's joy at her guardian's return. Poor girl! she has some absurd notion, I have never contradicted, that she is going to live with him; as if such a plan were possible at his age! For, you see,' she added, confidentially, 'though not lovers, they may become so, Captain Thornton.' Dick, who was tapping the carpet impatiently with his foot, made no reply, and she continued, maliciously, 'And you may find yourself provided with a rival.'

'I do not follow your meaning,' he replied, coldly.

'If you will dine here to-night, I can make it clearer. The Lillburnes are coming; Colonel Carmichael is, I believe, an old friend of hers. Something more before her marriage, if report speaks true.' She smiled. 'Do you think I have erred in asking them to meet? Lord Lillburne is, as we all know, inclined to be jealous.'

'You are the best judge in this matter,' replied Captain Thornton, impatiently. 'From what I have already seen, however, I should say Colonel Carmichael is not likely to rouse

Lord Lillburne's jealousy, he is far too much taken up with Miss Fitz-Maurice to have eyes or ears for anyone else. I accept your invitation for this evening with pleasure, Lady Ballina. Good-bye until then.'

So saying, Dick bolted, shutting the hall-door after him with a bang, as he murmured,

'You arch hypocrite! you are plotting mischief, I am convinced. If Shelah's happiness is therein involved, Dick Thornton will find means of frustrating your machinations.'

Lady Ballina started angrily as the door of her own house was so rudely shut, as it were, in her face, and muttered,

'Young idiot! as if I was not aware he is over head and ears in love with Shelah. Ah! and he shall marry her too, if I can manage it, for by so doing I will work out my revenge both on this gallant colonel and her haughty ladyship.'

As she reflectively ascended the stairs, Lady Ballina's black brows were uncomfortably knitted, and the corners of her thin lips drooped ominously for any unfortunate subordinate who might perchance cross her path.

Arrived on the first landing, she looked furtively around, and then placed her hand cautiously on the handle of the drawing-room door, wholly unconscious that Bridget was peeping

over the banisters on the upper landing, in hopes of catching a glimpse of the newly-arrived hero, who was to bear herself and Shelah away from a bondage as heavy to both as was the Egyptians of old over Israel. Quickly she perceived Lady Ballina, and this was the position in which she caught that lady.

Captain Thornton having, in his exit from the drawing-room, closed the door but imperfectly, it was slightly ajar; taking advantage of this opportunity, with gentlest touch Lady Ballina pushed it a little more open, and, crouching down, was now deliberately listening to the conversation going on within. She had no desire to part from her step-daughter, on whose presence she mainly depended for the success of her own *début* the following year; and she greatly feared lest Shelah's revelations should lead to Colonel Carmichael removing her from under her protection. Nothing could better exemplify her entire lack of appreciation of Shelah's generous high-minded nature than did Lady Ballina's present conduct, Had no other consideration kept Shelah's lips closed with respect to the hard and tyrannical manner in which Lady Ballina had treated her, having been her father's wife would have sufficed to prevent Shelah making a single complaint of her conduct.

However, the listener in the present instance did not, as most listeners are inevitably secure of doing, hear evil of herself, nor was she given much time to gain the information she sought, had it been otherwise, for quickly creeping down the stairs, as she muttered, 'Ah! Jezabel, ye'r at your dirthy tricks again,'—from whence it may be inferred Lady Ballina was not new at her ignoble work,—Bridget stole up unobserved close to her, and, when all but touching the listener, gave a stentorian cough.

Springing guiltily to her feet, and with a face crimson with shame, Lady Ballina turned and found herself face to face with, as she knew, her bitterest foe.

'How dare you be eavesdropping on the front staircase, woman?' she exclaimed, furiously.

'Those who live in glass houses shouldn't throw stones, me lady,' responded Bridget, quietly closing the door and planting herself before it.

Her anger increased at being unable to contradict this statement, Lady Ballina hissed out,

'I will not stand your insolence any longer, woman. We shall see if Colonel Carmichael has no power to dismiss you.'

'Shall we go in and inquire, me lady? I wouldn't speak so loud if I were you. It would be moighty onpleasant for your ladyship if the

colonel found out at the first start that he must bung up all the keyholes in any house yer ladyship dwells in.'

Unable to control her fury at this last remark, Lady Ballina raised her hand threateningly, as though intending to strike her enemy.

'I wouldn't if I were you, me lady; the law is a moighty throublesome customer to have dealings with,' said the impassible Bridget, moving quietly off, perfectly secure that Lady Ballina would leave the occupants of the drawing-room unmolested for the present.

That Bridget was occasionally disrespectful to Lady Ballina cannot be denied, but this was only under dire provocation and always in defence of her young mistress, for Bridget's sharp tongue and ready humour could not always be controlled; nor was Shelah, who always preached respect as due to her father's widow, the least aware of the poisoned arrows of insolence and malice the poor woman had to put up with from the pampered upper servants in Lady Ballina's large establishment, who resented the homely Irishwoman's presence in their midst, and even tried, though in vain, to make the housekeeper's room intolerable to her. On one occasion they flattered themselves they had hit on a plan that must prove effectual. When all

were assembled for dinner, Bridget found a plate of potatoes and a cup of butter-milk prepared for her repast. Without a word, having previously crossed herself—an act of devotional faith always followed by open derision from the others—she calmly ate the meal prepared for her, then, rising from the table, turned and thanked the housekeeper for so kindly recollecting she was a Catholic, and that it was Friday, and begged she would always keep this fact in remembrance in future.

'Maybe,' she added, looking sternly round, 'a little fasting would be good for ye all, and bring down yer proud stomachs, and help to mend yer un-Christian manners!'

She was left in peace for a considerable period after this episode.

But we must return to Lady Ballina, who, still trembling with passion and shame at the ignominious position in which she had been discovered by the woman she was always seeking to humiliate, rose from her knees, and, hurrying to her boudoir, burst into tears of rage at her discomfiture. She felt she had placed a powerful weapon of defence in Bridget's hands against any attempts on her part to get rid of this imperturbable woman, while it might be used at any moment to her own injury.

CHAPTER IX.

ABSORBED in her own happiness, Shelah had wholly forgotten Dick Thornton's existence, and had not even noticed his departure. Still holding Hugh's hand, she was gazing up at him in a perfect rapture of gladness. After a moment she said, in a low voice,

'Hugh, Hugh! I am so full of joy at seeing you again. But may I still call you by your Christian name? Will this not be disrespectful, now I am your ward?'

'Hugh, nothing but Hugh, now and ever,' he answered, quickly, and almost involuntarily he stooped and kissed her golden curls. 'You are quite a young lady now, sweet Shelah. I could not have believed three years could have wrought so magic a change. You have attained the great age of sixteen, if I recollect rightly——'

'Seventeen, sir, next month,' she replied, smilingly. 'But the change is only outward. Look, I have worn this to-day to prove that such is the case.' She lightly touched the

butterfly at her throat. 'Psyche is Psyche still, you see. And how could it be otherwise? There can never be any change in my heart towards one who has been so good to me as you have been; and how good, how generous to my beloved father. A generosity that I only heard of after you left.'

As she spoke, tears dimmed the lustre of her clear, truthful eyes. He gently led her to a sofa, and, sitting down by her side, said, sadly,

'Ah! if your poor father had only trusted me a little more, all might have been well with him.'

'I told you how bravely he sacrificed his life for another.' Her shyness was conquered now, and she laid her head on his shoulder where, in all her childish griefs, it had so often rested before.

A thrill of pleasure ran through Hugh's whole frame as she did so, but he refrained from caressing that lovely head as he would have done of old, contenting himself with taking her hand in his, as she continued,

'Have you found out anything about the young girl whose life my dear father saved? Lady Ballina would make no enquiries, nor allow me to do so. The subject was, she said, too painful to her. Alas, alas! as though it were not much more so to me. But I have always felt that he would not wish us to forget her entirely.'

'I made enquiries about her, Shelah, through my agent. Some day I shall acquaint you with the whole story, and in the present, I am able to set your mind at ease respecting her. With the consent of her parents, she has entered a very strict convent, and devoted herself completely to religion. Ah! Shelah, your father will receive his reward, for to save a soul from eternal death is far more glorious than the most heroic deed of personal valour ever recorded on the battle-field.'

'Your words are sweetest music to me, *you* k nowwhat a generous, loving heart my father's was.' A tear rolled down Shelah's cheek as she spoke. 'I have no bitterness against her who was the occasion of his death,' she continued. 'I love to dwell on the remembrance of his bravery, and for his sake I am deeply interested in the fate of this poor girl. It is sad to think of her being shut out, for ever, from sight and sound of this lovely world.'

'She has perhaps done best for her eternal welfare, Shelah,' replied Hugh. 'Though more sinned against than sinning she had deeply erred, and desires to devote the remainder of her days to penitence and prayer. You, my Shelah, have had to suffer for the sin of others, for well I know how you loved your father, and what a sorrow his loss must ever be to you.'

'Had it not been for the remembrance of you, I think I must have died when he left me; the burden of life without him, and the prospect of living with Lady Ballina, was almost unendurable at the time.'

'My poor Shelah,' he whispered, caressingly.

'No longer "poor Shelah," now you are here, never to go away again. For of course, as the war is over, and you are covered with glory and medals, you will leave the army. Then,' she continued, joyously, 'we are going to live together, and you will see how cleverly I will manage your household. It will remind me of old times, dear old times, except that *he* will not be with us.'

As Colonel Carmichael did not immediately answer, she laid her hand on his arm, and looked anxiously in his face, saying,

'Surely you are going to stay at home now that Mr. Barclay, who you allowed to live on at your place, is dead. Hugh, why don't you answer me? You are my guardian, and have a right to arrange my future life; you will not leave me dependent any longer on Lady Ballina's bounty, a humiliating position she ever keeps me in remembrance of?'

'How dares she!' exclaimed Hugh, roused by indignation out of the perplexity into which

Shelah's pleading questioning had cast him. For as yet he had formed no plans for either his own future or hers. 'Even if circumstances, quite out of my control, forbid for a time your coming to reside with me, my sweet ward, you are entirely free from all dependancy on your step-mother, beyond the protection she affords you as your father's wife. If she has made a contrary assertion, she is guilty of the grossest falsehood. As your guardian, I am nursing the Ballina property for you, and, with your good uncle's help, we trust to place it ultimately in your hands, freed from all encumbrances.' Unaware that Shelah was wholly inattentive to what he had just said, Hugh continued, rather nervously, 'But there is a surplus left more than sufficient for your present requirements, and out of it your governess has received her salary.' Hugh did not add that he had considerably supplemented this surplus, and purposely kept concealed from his ward's knowledge that he had done so. 'But, Shelah, I do not think you are paying the slightest attention to my exposition of your affairs, and yet, unworldly as I know you to be, you must begin to interest yourself in what concerns you so nearly, and also to understand every detail of business relating to your Irish estates.'

'What does anything matter to me now, since you will not have me to live with you?' she replied, looking up at him, with deep reproach and gathering tears in her eyes. Then, in a voice of despair, she exclaimed, 'Hugh, Hugh! this happy prospect has alone upheld me since my father's death.'

She covered her face with her hands and burst into tears. Never did a man feel more dismayed or in a greater dilemma than did this Crimean hero at the sight of Shelah's tears. So long deprived of all companionship, save that of his military comrades, his whole being had been moved and thrilled with delightful emotion on first seeing this beautiful girl clad in her fresh dainty attire, and in the budding spring-tide of gracious, unsophisticated womanhood, while in the undisguised and radiant happiness lighting up her whole countenance, and beaming forth from her truthful eyes on seeing him again, he held the pleasing certitude that he retained the same place in her affections as of old,—a thought which caused him overpowering happiness. As a child, he had loved her for a simplicity and beauty of character most rare, and enshrined in a form that did not falsify the pure soul within. As a woman, he quickly realized she was to be adored, but not

exclusively by him. A disturbing reflection! Unflinchingly Hugh had faced the enemy's shot and shell scores of times, but to see Shelah, whose young life had hitherto been so clouded, in tears within so short a space of his return, and to know those tears were perhaps caused by misapprehension of his affection for her, was beyond his power of endurance, and, taking her hands from her face, he placed them to his lips, saying, with deep tenderness,

'Shelah, you must know you are the supreme and only interest I have in life. You have always trusted me hitherto, have I ever failed you?'

'Never,' she replied, fervently, and with renewed hope.

'Then, dearest, do not mistrust me now, even though I may possibly act in a way you do not quite understand, and that I cannot in the present explain. That you will one day make my home yours is the most ardent desire I have in this world; to have you always near me, the dearest hope of my life; and, to realise it, I intend to work heaven and earth. To give up my profession requires the gravest consideration; a man is nothing without a profession, Shelah. Will you be patient, and bear with a little uncertainty, until I see my way clearer?'

He looked at her anxiously. Would she, like

most women, insist upon clearer explanations? He was soon set at ease, for looking up brightly she answered, with a loving smile,

'I can bear with any amount of uncertainty after what you have said, in fact uncertainty no longer exists. If we cannot trust those who have never failed us, who can we trust?'

'You are the same as ever, Shelah. Full of faith and belief in others, because faithful and guileless yourself, your womanhood does not belie your childhood, dear one.'

'Was I ever a child, Hugh? I think my childhood ceased when my mother died. But you must not think too well of me, I fear I am very often mistrustful of some people.'

'Your step-mother, for instance,' he said, laughing. 'But tell me, is living with her so very distasteful to you? If it is, I can easily place you under other chaperonage until I see my way to procuring you a more permanent home.' The colour deepened in Hugh's bronzed cheek as he spoke.

'I would never leave my step-mother except to go to you, Hugh. She is my father's widow, if I were to leave her it might cast reflection on his choice. I must do nothing that in the eyes of others would be a mark of disrespect to his memory.'

Colonel Carmichael gazed admiringly at the girl's face as she spoke, and, to try her still further, said,

'Such sentiments are worthy of you, Shelah. But your father did not marry Lady Ballina from any deep affection he entertained for her, I fear.'

'Hush, hush! dear Hugh. Let us not allude to the sad, irrevocable past. How my father struggled against the fatal step he finally took, I alone know. I was too young to influence him against his marriage. I think it is best he should be at rest. His life could not have been a happy one, and, as far as I am concerned, there may be, and of course are, faults on both sides. They say "forgive and forget." This is easier said than done. I have forgiven Lady Ballina, but how can I forget that, owing to her, I was nearly too late to see my father alive. But let us talk of other matters. You are here—near me, I can see you, speak to you. Existence is changed for me. But where are your medals? where is your Victoria Cross? I expected to see them all on my gallant colonel's breast,' she said, playfully.

'That would be swagger on my part, dearest. And, to begin with, we have yet to receive these medals from our gracious Queen. And then,

Shelah, I am only in my undress military attire, having no other decent clothes at present; my first visit after this must be to a tailor.'

'Certainly, this coat has seen much service by the look of it,' she observed, laughing. 'Is it the one in which you fought all those dreadful battles? The very thought of those horrible scenes, followed by all their train of sorrow, makes me sad. How grateful, infinitely grateful I am you were spared, never even wounded. When I think of the grief of others, my meed of joy makes me doubly thankful.'

'My hairbreadth escapes have certainly been wonderful. Perhaps you would have thought more of me if I had returned short of a limb, Shelah. Even Nelson was a greater hero with ladies from having lost an arm and an eye.'

'I infinitely prefer your having kept both. I hardly know whether you are handsome or not, but your face to me is dearer than all others, and nothing could make you a greater hero in my estimation than you are already,' she said, simply. 'I made Captain Thornton quite angry by my constant allusions to you and the Crimea. And where on earth is he flown to? I forgot all about him when you arrived. I ought to have made you known to each other.'

This speech completed Hugh's happiness. He

had observed Dick when he entered the room, and a jealous pang had momentarily chastened the joy he felt at Shelah's rapturous greeting, for why should these two be alone together? As though replying to his inward question, Shelah answered,

'He was helping me to arrange the flowers that had just arrived from Ballina. You will like Captain Thornton, Hugh. He has been such a kind friend to me. He lent me a horse to ride all this winter, because Lady Ballina refused to get me one.'

'I should like anyone who is kind to you, Shelah,' he replied, gravely. 'But why did you not tell me you required a horse? and you should at once have had one of your own. Remember I alone am the privileged purveyor of everything you may wish to possess.'

For a moment she did not reply, and slightly coloured. She had intended to write and tell Hugh she wished to have a horse, but had been prevented doing so by Lady Ballina saying that it would be an indelicate proceeding on her part, as she had not the means of buying one herself, and also that Colonel Carmichael was aware of her desire and could satisfy it if he thought fit. Immediately afterwards, Dick Thornton bought a new hunter, and, under pretence that it was

not up to his weight, lent it to Shelah, for whom the purchase had really been made. She, of course, was wholly ignorant of the fact, though Lady Ballina was not; and, while Dick looked upon the horse as a gift, Shelah simply considered it in the light of a kindly loan. From the gravity of Hugh's manner she imagined, however, he did not approve of her having accepted it, and she said, timidly,

'Have I done wrong in riding Captain Thornton's horse?'

'No, no,' he replied, quickly, ashamed of his incipient jealousy; 'but I shall at once get you one of your own—the prettiest I can find. You have not yet ridden in London, I suppose? But now we shall ride together every day at an hour when fashionable life is still asleep and we can have the park to ourselves.'

Again Shelah hesitated, disturbed in mind. But she would have no secrets from Hugh, and said, rather sorrowfully, feeling instinctively he would be disappointed,

'Oh, I am sorry to tell you I have already ridden early in the morning in the park with Captain Thornton and Lord Lillburne. Lady Ballina urged me to do so, saying it was perfectly correct and good for my health, as I was looking white and pasty. She is never very

complimentary.' Though Hugh smiled, she observed a deep shade of annoyance flit across his face, and she added, lovingly, 'I am so vexed now that I followed her advice, for I should much have preferred your being the first to take me out riding in London.'

'And so should I, Shelah. I fear I am a selfish fellow, for I positively believe I would have liked to deprive you of a pleasure in order that I might have been the first to procure you its gratification.'

He was much vexed. Evidently an encouraged intimacy had sprung up between Shelah and Captain Thornton, of which he had been kept wholly in ignorance. That there had been some adverse agency at work, striving to wean her affections from him and tending to weaken his influence over his ward, he felt certain. But he was determined not to awake such a suspicion in her mind, and also to conquer certain feelings in his own breast that had found birth there, and for which he condemned himself severely. Therefore, crushing them down resolutely, and looking at Shelah with fond, admiring eyes, he said,

'It is so pleasant to feast one's eyes on such a dainty, well-dressed young lady as you are, after seeing nothing but those shapeless, Turk-

ish women for so long, shuffling about in their loose garments and yellow slippers. Tell me, what is your pretty gown made of?'

'Oh, Hugh—dear, stupid Hugh!' she laughed, merrily. 'My gown is made of exactly the same material as those shapeless, Turkish women's garments are. It is Broussa gauze, and, moreover, a present from yourself. I had it made up expressly for your return; this is the first day I have worn it.'

'And the roses, Shelah—that pretty bouquet in your bodice, smelling so sweet—' he stooped and placed his lips to the flowers, 'who gave you these?'

He waited, with a jealous throb at his heart, for the answer.

'I hardly know whether I ought to reveal the giver's name,' she replied, with arch mystery.

'You need not, if you do not desire to do so,' he answered, stiffly.

'Ah, you are drawing down the corners of your mouth and making the line between your eyes much deeper, as you used to do when I had done something as a child to displease you. You must smile, sir, before I tell you this great secret.' She took the end of his moustache and lifted it softly up, as she was wont to do in the days she alluded to. 'Ah,' she exclaimed, 'there

is the sunbeam.' Hugh was in a condition of idiotic happiness as he felt those taper fingers so near his mouth, and still more so when Shelah, pulling his head down, whispered in his ear, 'Mick sent me the bouquet. He always makes a special one for me when the flowers come from Ballina.'

'Give me a rose out of it, if it will not spoil your nosegay,' he asked, pleadingly. 'And if you think Mick will not be jealous.'

Without a word she took a rosebud from the flowers nestling in the folds of her gown, and placed it in his button-hole, saying as she did so,

'It ought to be a laurel crown that I bestow on you, instead of this pretty little flower. How brave and strong you must be, Hugh, to have taken that terrible shell in your hands and thus to have saved so many lives at risk of your own.'

'You exaggerate my prowess. Hardly a man would not have done the same. It was simply an act of presence of mind. Thousands have done deeds of valour meriting the Victoria Cross far more than what I did, and their brave actions have never been heard of. But tell me, sweet Shelah, are your friends exclusively gentlemen? Hitherto you have not mentioned a single lady. Are we men alone honoured with your friendship? You must have seen a

great deal of Lady Lillburne. Is there no intimacy between you?'

This was a point upon which Colonel Carmichael was most anxious to obtain information, for, though still interested in Mabel's welfare, he had no desire that she and Shelah should be much thrown together. Ultimately he fully intended, unaware that she was already acquainted with this passage in his life, to make known to Shelah the fact that he had been engaged to Lady Lillburne. The thought of doing so was, however, painful to him; for, in the new hopes of happiness that had taken such absolute possession of his whole being, he would have infinitely preferred, when the moment arrived for declaring his love to Shelah, to have been able to assure her she was his first and only affection.

To his last question she had hesitated to reply, and this he had quickly noted. The truth was she feared to wound him by a too open avowal of her opinion of his former love. After a pause, she said,

'I am but a girl, knowing nothing of the world, and she is a married woman—a fashionable lady, and we are also so sundered by difference in age. It is hardly possible we could have much in common. But she is always

kind in manner to me; and,' she continued, with a brightened manner, 'as you know her so well, you will be glad to hear that she and Lord Lillburne are perfectly happy together now.' Innocent Shelah, suspecting no evil, discerned none.

What answer Colonel Carmichael might have given to this last remark was lost, owing to the sudden entrance of Lady Ballina.

CHAPTER X.

SINCE the day that Colonel Carmichael had first made Lady Ballina's acquaintance she had greatly altered in appearance, and certainly not for the better; she still, however, remained a decidedly handsome, presentable woman, though she had grown larger and thereby lost what had originally been a very fine figure. The high colour also, to which Bridget had formerly taken such offence,—being convinced it was the result of art,—had, whether such was the case or not, greatly deepened, while both her gestures and address had become extremely artificial; for Lady Ballina had lately taken to a course of French novel-reading, and, failing poor Adela's sober admonitions, was ever endeavouring to frame her manners on those of the heroines therein depicted.

On the present occasion, if too elaborately, she was most becomingly attired in the height of prevailing fashion, while the whole room was

pervaded with the odour of musk, emanating from her flowing silken and lace garments. She had always had a weakness for perfumes. Poor Ballina had held them in detestation, and in deference to this pronounced dislike she had, during their short married life, abstained from their use; but having noted that all heroines in those French romances, to which she had lately turned her attention, were remarkable for the 'parfum enivrant' that emanated from their 'corps velonté et satiné,' she had resumed a disagreeable habit; though Captain Thornton observed one day to Shelah, that odious as it was, it had the desirable advantage of giving due notice of her ladyship's approach, and allowing time for retreat.

It must not be supposed that Lady Ballina resembled, in the slightest degree, those frail heroines of French romance, whom she took as models whereon to fashion her social manners. She was a strict and well-conducted woman, and, strong in her own rigid virtue, was pitiless in her strictures upon those whose conduct was in the least degree questionable. She had no mercy for weaknesses to which she herself was not inclined. A very common failing with humanity in general.

As Colonel Carmichael came forward to greet

her with extended hand, it was not without considerable emotion that he recalled to memory under what circumstances they had last met, and how fruitless his efforts had proved to prevent her marriage with Shelah's father. She had not forgotten those efforts either, though they had proved fruitless. Notwithstanding, she laid her hand in his with a most gracious smile, saying,

'You are indeed a welcome sight, Colonel Carmichael. I have been longing to express my joy at your returning to us unscathed from the battle-field, but refrained from disturbing your *tête-à-tête* with our dear Shelah.'

Lady Ballina, partially recovered from the humiliating effects of her encounter with Bridget, had given herself time to carefully prepare this speech, and as she spoke she placed her hands on Shelah's shoulder with affectionate familiarity. The girl remained cold and impassive beneath her step-mother's touch; she had become accustomed to these public demonstrations of an affection which had no existence.

'Thank you, both for your consideration and kind welcome, Lady Ballina,' replied Colonel Carmichael, looking at her gravely with his keen, deep-set eyes.

Hers fell beneath that searching gaze. She

had an uncomfortable conviction she was being read through and through by one who, knowing her character thoroughly, held her in slight esteem, and who she feared and disliked equally; for, though he had proved unsuccessful, she had never forgiven or forgotten the undisguised efforts he had made to impede her marriage with her lost husband. That he had been unsuccessful was, however, a consolatory reflection, affording her considerable satisfaction in the present moment. Still closely observing her, Hugh continued,

'I have, of course, as her guardian and the protector of her interests, many matters of importance to discuss with your step-daughter: though,' he added, with a smile, 'such grave subjects have not as yet occupied much of our attention. Later on, Lady Ballina, you and I must have some conversation respecting my ward's affairs.'

She gave a little start; his manner was so grave and ceremonious. Could Shelah have said anything to her prejudice? Observing her trepidation, and with a kindly desire of relieving any embarrassment she might feel, Shelah, said,

'No business, no serious talk for days to come please, Hugh. Let the joy of your home-coming remain cloudless.'

'I quite agree, dear Shelah. Indeed, we worn-out soldiers need repose, Lady Ballina. Will you allow me to dine here to-night? for truly I feel like a fish out of water in this overgrown town. Long absence has made me a stranger to its gay inhabitants.'

'Your gallant deeds cannot fail to have kept you in remembrance of all your friends. Every door, I am sure, will be thrown open to you in warmest welcome.' Lady Ballina was proud of this speech, and continued, graciously, 'You have forestalled the invitation in readiness from me, and I have postponed dinner on purpose to give you time to change your military attire.' She gave Shelah a peremptory glance.

'I am already dressed for the evening, but I observe you have your toilette still to make, Shelah. And Bridget is so poor a hand-maid you had better hasten to adorn yourself.—By-the-by, how is dear old Bridget? I have failed to enquire after her. She is, I trust, flourishing,' said Hugh.

'You will not find her the least changed. Her manners have not improved,' replied Lady Ballina, drily. 'I do not consider her at all a desirable or proper maid for Shelah, now that she is about to enter the world. But she holds a different opinion.'

'I neither wish nor ever intend to have any other maid but Bridget. If it were a question of change, I should never enter the world,' observed Shelah, with quick decision, as she was leaving the room. 'And you will find she is the same faithful-hearted creature, Hugh, she has ever been to our family.'

She looked anxiously back at him as she spoke. Lady Ballina, however, did not pursue a subject that had long been a matter of disagreement between herself and her step-daughter, but in a confidential, yet audible voice said, as though the thought had only suddenly struck her,

'The Lillburnes dine with us to-night. I hope it will not be painful to you, meeting her again? I ought to have remembered the past.'

Distinctly, as her step-mother fully intended, Shelah overheard these words. She also had reflected that such a possibility might exist, and lingered at the door, with an anxiety for which she could not have accounted, for Hugh's answer. It came quickly. He considered Lady Ballina's remark both impertinent and ill-bred, and trusted Shelah had not heard it, as it might force him into an explanation he desired to postpone. With perfect calmness, he replied,

'I am at a loss to understand your meaning,

Lady Ballina. Why should it be painful to me to meet Lady Lillburne? I have great pleasure in the thought of seeing her again. Lord Lillburne I am but slightly acquainted with.'

With a quick sigh of relief, Shelah fled up the stairs, singing joyously, while, turning to Colonel Carmichael, her step-mother observed, affectedly,

'Is it not pleasant to hear her so full of life, and to see her looking so fresh and lovely? She is always in the same good spirits as you see her now, dear girl.'

Lady Ballina had overshot the mark, and Hugh, smiling at the compliment paid to Shelah's complexion, remembering that she had told him that her step-mother termed it pasty, observed gravely,

'I am glad to hear you say this. Her letters to me were too often most sad ones.'

'Indeed!' elevating her eyebrows in astonishment. 'Something must have occurred she did not reveal to me. If you could see her and Captain Thornton together, happy as young lovers—I mean children—you would hardly believe it possible she could ever be sad.'

Lady Ballina looked up covertly to see the effect of this speech, and was disappointed. Not a muscle in Hugh's face changed. Whether her

words were true or not, he was confident they had been said with intention, and he replied, quietly,

'I have not the pleasure of knowing Captain Thornton, but it behoves me at once to make his acquaintance. Shelah is young to have a lover, though charming and beautiful enough to have many hereafter.'

'Oh, now you are running away with an idea, Colonel Carmichael. You place too great weight upon my words.'

'That is not my fault, Lady Ballina. You should be more careful as to the construction you wish me to place on what you say. But excuse me, if I am to be in time for dinner, I must take my leave at once.'

With a frigid bow he took up his hat and departed to get ready for dinner. He was seriously discomposed at what she had implied, though he had not allowed her to perceive this. A hard, malicious smile crossed Lady Ballina's lips as the door closed on him.

'He is more sententious and disagreeable than ever,' she murmured. 'But you had better be civil, gallant colonel, and make no effort to remove your ward from my chaperonage, or I may thwart your hopes and schemes as I did once before.'

Uneducated as she was, Lady Ballina was not deficient in observation, and this power had been considerably sharpened during the last three years, and aided by Lady Lillburne's sarcastic tuition, she had made the discovery that society is a wheel composed of many circles, and that we may stand shivering on its edge for an indefinite period, hopeless of advance, unless some friendly hand is held out to drag us into that innermost circle where the elect of fashionable life holds its rigidly exclusive court. At least, so it was in days gone by. In the present democratic age, outsiders, crying out for entrance into that social paradise, meet with more generous treatment, and there are those whose financial position accords them ready admittance into noble houses where angels, in former times, might have found it difficult, if not impossible, to force an entrance.

Financially, Lady Ballina's position was a splendid one, and, had it been backed by her husband's support and presence, she would have found no obstacle in reigning as a queen of society; but Lord Ballina lay in his quiet grave, beside the wife of his youth, undisturbed any longer by the ambitious aspirations of the low-born woman, who in a moment of desperation he had raised to a status she so coveted, and

was so little fit to occupy. Alone she must stem the adverse currents and rude rebuffs that might impede the attainment of her wishes. For this reason, and no other, was she so desirous to keep Shelah beneath her roof. For her step-daughter could and would be received everywhere, while, in order to introduce her with proper *éclat*, she could give entertainments for which otherwise there would be no valid reason.

The apathy and indifference that Shelah evinced for society, and at the thought of going out in London, was a subject that gave her step-mother serious annoyance, and on one or two occasions had given rise to a violent outburst of temper on her part. She regarded such apathy as affectation and eccentricity, phases of character she was in the habit of attributing to Shelah, who would never give her reasons for what certainly appeared a strange freak on the part of so beautiful a girl, who might naturally be supposed to be thirsting to make her entry into the gay world. But, lovely and full of unconscious fascination as she was, Shelah had no ardent longing for the arrival of an event that fills most girls' heads with palpitating emotions of delight—anticipations of love and matrimony.

Young as she was, she had already seen a good deal of a world unknown to other girls of

her age, and had sorrowfully noted how her father, and through him she herself, had suffered from the force of its unresisted temptations. To her it had already proved a world full of struggle and sorrow, and she had no desire to plunge into that vortex of pleasure it is supposed to accord its votaries, and which was contemplated with such eager longing by Lady Ballina.

Had her father lived, Shelah might have felt very differently. But he had left her, as she often sadly reflected, worse than alone, for the thought of being introduced into society by her step-mother was abhorrent to her refined mind, even in contemplation; and yet unless Lady Lillburne undertook this office, a chaperonage she would have liked still less, there was no alternative for poor Shelah. Once she had thought of asking Hugh, when he returned from the Crimea, if he would take her out, should it be considered by him absolutely imperative she must make her *début* in society. But, in the short hour of their first meeting, she had learned, without making the request, that this was an impossibility. Therefore, she was now determined to implore him to make some arrangement by which she might altogether escape an ordeal so distasteful to her feelings.

As Lady Ballina flung herself on to a sofa in

a lately-studied attitude of graceful *abandon*, she must have been reflecting that such a request might possibly be made by her step-daughter, for she muttered, audibly,

'Tiresome, stupid girl! she is sure to mar my projects if she can; I must be beforehand with her. She prevented me giving a ball this year by the silent gravity of her manner, by scruples I dared not combat, and Mabel sided with her. She does not care to hasten the time when a younger rival will overshadow her maturer charms, and carry off her admirers. She imagines I am too stupid to observe her manœuvres, but she will find I am not quite so blind and dull as it is her pleasure to believe me. Ah! my Lady Lillburne, I have many a score to settle with you.'

At this point of her soliloquy Lady Ballina sprang up, and a spiteful light glittered in her black eyes as she glanced round her highly ornate drawing-room fresh from the hands of gilders and upholsterers. She had recalled to memory, with bitter annoyance, a speech made by Lady Lillburne on first viewing this gorgeous apartment.

'Ah, my dear creature,' observed Mabel, in the pleasantest of voices, as though she were saying something peculiarly likely to please the

hearer, while a satirical smile played round the corners of her pretty mouth, 'Solomon's dwelling would sink into insignificance before the glory of this apartment. Your nuggets shine in every direction.' She veiled her eyes as though blinded by the dazzling sight, then continued reflectively, as she gazed round again ironically, 'London fogs and smoke will, however, soon partially tone down this resplendent apartment. And then—your gilded mansion will not be quite so public an advertisement of wealth.'

'Insolent woman!' exclaimed Lady Ballina, rising brusquely as she mentally writhed anew beneath the recollection of a still rankling impertinence. Clenching her hands, she added, vindictively, 'Ah, she had better not try me too far, or she may find the worm she treads on so often may and will turn and rend her.'

At this instant the irritated speaker's glance caught sight of the letter Captain Thornton had dropt unread a short time before, and which, in the excitement of Colonel Carmichael's arrival and the deep despondency into which his presence had plunged him, he had forgotten.

Quick as thought Lady Ballina pounced upon this missive, and, as she held it in her hand, recognised Lady Lillburne's hand-writing. She was aware of the reports so detrimental to

Mabel's reputation that had been in circulation, though they had partially died out during this season, in consequence of Captain Thornton being now completely taken up with Shelah, and going less into society—notwithstanding Lady Lillburne's reproaches at his thus absenting himself. Her vanity was hurt as she reflected that the world might consider his devotion to her had slackened. Of her fair fame, in her thoughtlessness and thirst of admiration, she was recklessly careless. The world was always ill-natured whether there was cause or not. She cared but little for its opinion—nothing for that name her husband had given her, of which he was so jealous and upon which she had already brought considerable discredit.

Lady Ballina's hands trembled with excitement as she held giddy, foolish Mabel's letter in her grasp. The seal was broken, what easier than to read the contents, and perhaps by this means hold her haughty partroness under future subjection? Through her whole career, Lady Ballina had been utterly unscrupulous in the means she made use of to attain any desired end she had in view. Perhaps, had she foreseen the terrible results that would ensue from this act of treachery, she would have hesitated before accomplishing her design. But she was not an

imaginative woman, and the thought of present revenge, of being able, under certain circumstances, to humiliate one who had so often humiliated her, alone possessed Lady Ballina. She had still half-an-hour before her guests arrived or Shelah made her appearance. Hastily glancing at the clock, she eagerly opened the note and read what was intended for no eye but Captain Thornton's. As she read, suspicions hitherto only cursorily entertained seemed, she thought, to receive strongest confirmation. Lady Lillburne was in love with Captain Thornton, was endeavouring to prevent his marriage with Shelah —that marriage upon which her husband's heart was set. Lady Ballina's eye glowed like red-hot coals with virtuous indignation. She laughed spitefully, and then started nervously at the sudden clapping of a door, not that her tremors were caused by any smitings of conscience or fear of being discovered in her base occupation. She was far too deeply absorbed in the detection of another's sin and weakness to be alive to the shamefulness of her own conduct. In the bitterness of a most unchristian spirit, she was rejoicing at the discovery, as she believed, of a fellow-creature's moral downfall.

'Wicked, wicked woman! Bad, false wife!' she exclaimed, as, crimson with excitement, she

placed the letter in a jewelled casket close at hand, and, having carefully locked it, placed the key inside the bodice of her gown.

That the letter Lady Ballina had carefully perused should never have been written by one who was a wife, and who loved and honoured her husband—that it was of a dangerously compromising character there was no doubt, for Lady Lillburne had penned it under the influence of all-devouring jealousy at the attention Captain Thornton had for some time openly paid Shelah, and at the palpable evidence of his weakened interest in herself. But, however deep or slight might be Mabel's offence against her husband, the enemy had no intention of according her the benefit of a doubt. She owed Mabel many bitter grudges—the opportunity of avenging them was in her power. To little purpose had Lady Ballina read and heard read those words of mercy: 'If thy brother trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone.' Very different was Lady Ballina's opinion. Lady Lillburne was a bad woman! a false wife! It was only right that her husband should be made acquainted with her deception. Having come to this conclusion, Lady Ballina began to ponder how this was to be effected without injuring herself in the eyes of others,

and, in pondering, her reflections suddenly turned into another channel.

Supposing Shelah were removed from her care, or remain obstinate in her determination to lead the life of a nun? Or if a serious breach were to take place between Lord and Lady Lillburne, owing to what she meditated doing, how then would her own introduction into society fare? Without her step-daughter, she would be nobody. If Shelah failed her, she would more than ever require the support of those leading-strings in her social advancement whereby she had hitherto been upheld and guided by Lady Lillburne. They certainly were pulled very hard occasionally, and fretted and chafed her considerably; but if, unsupported by Shelah, she broke loose from them, who would present her at court—introduce her into the paradise of fashionable life so long the goal of her aspirations? Before such momentous considerations, the subject of Lady Lillburne's morality became for the nonce of secondary importance. Lady Ballina's vengeance must remain in abeyance—her virtuous indignation must for awhile slumber. When her footing in society was quite secure, then only could she afford to revenge herself on the woman who had so often and so cruelly humiliated her. Now, however, the tables

were turned, and as she heard a cab driving up to the door, announcing the arrival of her first guest, she exclaimed triumphantly,

'Ah, my Lady Lillburne, you had better be careful, for I hold your reputation in the hollow of my hand.'

CHAPTER XI.

Composed as Colonel Carmichael had appeared in Lady Ballina's presence, her malicious shafts had not been wholly ineffectual in their design, and he was not a little disturbed in mind at events having arisen he had never anticipated. Shelah's overflowing joy at seeing him again, so naturally and frankly expressed, and so perfectly in unison with his own feelings, had caused him intense happiness, and upon it he had quickly constructed a certainty of future bliss. How much more beautiful and engaging she was than even his fervid imagination had pictured her! What innocence and candour beamed from her dark, speaking eyes! Though he had been unable to explain to her his reasons for not as yet being able to offer her a home, what faith and trust in him she had displayed. No withering breath of the world had passed over this fair, young girl, tending to mar one of God's most perfect handiworks. Beautiful as an angel,

she was as guileless as Eve when she first came forth from the hands of her Maker to grace the garden of Eden. Love made Hugh poetic.

For her sake he would find it no hard task even to relinquish the profession in which he had already so distinguished himself, and during the short hour of their first brief meeting he had almost determined to do so. Then a cloud had arisen overshadowing his rapturous dreams and cooling this sudden determination, and, though he did not accord perfect credence to Lady Ballina's innuendoes, the cloud would not be wholly dispersed. Shelah had an admirer, perhaps a lover! Words he had so ardently hoped he would be the first to breathe in her ear had already been whispered by another.

'But, pshaw!' he exclaimed, suddenly, and kicking a boot-jack out of his way, 'I am a fool to treat that scheming woman's statements seriously. Shelah did not display the slightest embarrassment in speaking of him, and to-night will either confirm or dispel my every fear and doubt.'

Having come to this philosophical decision he proceeded to dress, and. his toilette completed, placed Shelah's rose in his button-hole. Strange to say, Dick Thornton—for men at times are as idiotically sentimental as the veriest school-girls

—was doing precisely the same thing with the rose Shelah had dropped and he had appropriated, while with a heavy heart he was reflecting that the many pleasant days they had spent together were for ever ended, for assuredly this handsome but rather stern-looking guardian of hers would never permit the continuance of an intimacy Lady Ballina had not only allowed but encouraged.

As Dick made his way to Grosvenor Place, with both head and heart occupied solely with Shelah, nothing could have been further from her thoughts than he was. Regardless of the lateness of the hour, she was plunged in the depths of an arm-chair, conning over every detail, every word of her meeting with Hugh. When Bridget reminded her the gong would sound for dinner in ten minutes, she replied,

'I can dress in five. Don't be a dear old fidget. I have so much to tell you—so much to say, I can only say to you.'

'Well, Miss Shelah darling, I'll just whip off your gown and take down your hair, and then ye can go on discoursing to your heart's content; and it's me that wants to hear about the dear, brave colonel—I'm sure he's handsome as ever.'

Shelah stood up for a moment, mechanically, in order to divest herself of her gown. There

was a soft, dreamy look in her eyes, a blush on her cheek, as, sinking back in the chair and clasping her small hands together, she exclaimed,

'Oh, Bridget, I am so happy—so happy. I am wild with joy. Of course! he is just the same as ever. And'—the colour deepened in her face—'he looks so much younger than I recollected him; I suppose that is because I am so much older myself. Fancy *his* being my guardian! I shall be obliged to consult him about everything; do what *he* tells me. How charming to have him to go to in all my troubles. He dines here to-night, Bridget, and I have so many things to consult him about I hardly know where to begin,' she concluded, with a deep-drawn breath of intense satisfaction.

'I shall try and catch a glimpse of the colonel when he arrives; I couldn't sleep otherwise,' observed Bridget, as she smoothed out Shelah's curls, a task she dearly loved.

'He asked after you, Bridget, and I told him right out that you were never, never going to leave me. But, if you pull my hair so cruelly I will send you away to-morrow, you wicked woman.' She could feel Bridget's hands were trembling, and, turning swiftly round, she seized them in her own and looked up at her with laughing affection. 'I believe you and Lady

Ballina have fallen out. Why, there are tears in your eyes, Bridget!'

'We have had a bit of a brush, dearie. I believe her ladyship would get rid of me quick enough if she had her own way.'

'But she won't in this case, Bridget. You are a perfect maid, and I desire no other; but I wonder if you would mind taking a few lessons in hair-dressing, so as to enable you to do my hair in some of the new fashions? Lady Ballina says my curls are ridiculous and childish for my age—what do you think?'

Bridget burst into a scornful laugh.

'Maybe she would like to see your head like her own—all the world like a haystack! No, no, leave your pretty curls as nature turned them. I'm sure the colonel will want no alteration.'

'Nor do I, either,' exclaimed Shelah, with quick remembrance of how Hugh had taken up her curls and kissed them.

'And when are we to leave this house, dearie? Has the colonel made mention about this at all?'

'Yes, Bridget; some day we are to live with him, but not yet. You must remember he is still in the army, and he likes soldiering so much, I am sorry to say, that I fear it will be a struggle for him to give up his profession, though, ultimately, I have no doubt he will.'

'Well, everyone has their own tastes, but, for my part, I can't understand what pleasure there can be in hacking and hewing your fellow-creatures to pieces, even if they are Rooshians! And now the colonel's safe back, Miss Shelah, it's my opinion he had better stay at home, and I shall speak my moind to him.'

Shelah could not help smiling, as she replied,

'You forget the glory attending on war, Bridget. Sad as it is, if it were not that kings and governments fell out with each other we should have no Wellingtons or Nelsons. Ah,' she exclaimed with a face of dismay, 'there is the dinner-bell, and I am not half dressed. We must make haste, or I shall be in disgrace; but I hardly think Lady Ballina will scold me to-night.'

Shelah's simple toilette was soon completed, and, without giving herself time to judge of its effect in the glass, she flew downstairs.

'Poor lamb!' murmured the woman, as she bustled about, tidying her young mistress's room, 'to think of her having no one but an old woman like me to care for her. But it will be different now the colonel's come, and didn't he swear to her blessed ladyship that he would always be her protector? How prettily she blushed when she spoke about him to-day. He's none so old, as she said herself, the darlin'. And

hasn't he loved her from the first day he picked us up upon the bog?'

Bridget smiled with satisfaction at her own cogitations, and, from her soliloquy, it may be gathered she also had formed plans of her own for her mistress's future.

Shelah entered the drawing-room slightly flurried at being late. Colonel Carmichael and Dick Thornton were standing at the window, engaged in conversation. Both were at once silenced, for the simple reason that, though they were discussing military matters apparently with great interest, their thoughts were wholly occupied with the hope of seeing her appear. Lady Ballina, still retaining the studied attitude of graceful ease she had assumed on the ottoman, looked uncommonly sulky as Shelah approached her, and said, deprecatingly,

'I am glad to find Lord and Lady Lillburne have not arrived. I feared I was the last.'

'That would be difficult where Lady Lillburne is concerned, Miss Fitz-Maurice,' observed Captain Thornton.

'Yes; I believe, if dinner were at ten, she would make a point of not arriving until the half-hour. And if the dinner is spoilt she blames my cook, though she engaged him herself,' angrily observed Lady Ballina.

'You will allow his back is broad enough to bear the sins of many others besides the culprit in question, Lady Ballina,' he replied, moving towards his hostess; while Shelah, glad to have escaped reproof, joined Hugh at the window. He gave her a welcoming smile as she approached and said,

'Bridget and I were so busy talking, we forgot the hour.'

'The subject of your conversation must have been all-absorbing to make you thus oblivious of time. May I enquire what it was, Shelah?'

The colour deepened in her cheek as she looked up shyly, and answered,

'You, of course.'

At this short answer, embodying so much, a smile of complete satisfaction passed over his face; the cloud was rising, and he replied, in a low voice,

'If you knew how delightful it is to me to find I have not lost my old place in your affection, Shelah. I have dwelt on this possibility with so much pain, feared so much, what after all would be but natural, that some happier individual might have stolen what I so long to retain.'

'How could that be possible?' she asked, in unfeigned surprise. 'Whom have I in this world

to care for now except you? Oh, Hugh! can I ever forget you were my mother's best friend, —can I forget all you did for my father, all you have been to me?'

There was almost reproach in her voice. Reproach that in no way hurt Hugh, for, after such words, who could doubt she was heart-free —that Lady Ballina's statement was the veriest myth? The cloud she had raised was dispersing, his sun of happiness was shining brilliantly as ever, and, in the estacy of this conviction, he threw a quick glance of mingled triumph and compassion towards Dick Thornton, whose eyes were mournfully fixed upon this happy pair so completely centred in each other, and said gaily,

'"Que va a la chasse perd sa place" very often, dear Shelah. *I* certainly have no one else to care for except you in the whole world. But the day must come, and that day cannot be far off, when your case may be very different.'

'Wait until that day arrives,' she responded, as she moved away, for the door had opened and the Lillburnes had been announced.

So completely had Hugh's thoughts been occupied with one subject that, until he heard Lady Lillburne's name, he had failed to remember he was to meet her. But as she sailed into the room, with a grace of movement entirely

her own, which Lady Ballina was always vainly striving to imitate, and looking as lovely as ever, Hugh started. A host of long-forgotten memories were evoked by her sudden presence, for, with a man of so strong and deep a character as his, the traces left by a first attachment can never be wholly effaced. Then, when he had last seen this beautiful woman, he had been filled with sorrow and compassion for her unhappy married life, and, notwithstanding his interest in her welfare had been weakened by absence and the excitement of a military life, it had never wholly died out, and it was with honest satisfaction he had learnt from Shelah that Mabel and her husband were reconciled and on more amicable terms.

With a tightening of her heart-strings, and the instinct of affection, Shelah had noticed, slight as it was, Hugh's involuntary start of emotion as Lady Lillburne entered the room, and, remembering the embroidered romance of their engagement she had confided to her at Nice, attributed his emotion not unnaturally to pain at meeting his former love again; and, as this thought flashed through her mind, an indignant feeling of contemptuous displeasure against Lady Lillburne rose within her, at conduct on Mabel's part long since forgiven by Hugh,

while at the same time Shelah reflected how incumbent it was on her to lavish a double meed of affection on him who had received so cruel a wound.

It was with the sweetest feminine curiosity, partaking slightly of jealousy, though she was unconscious of it, that she watched the greeting between Hugh and Lady Lillburne. Mabel was quite equal to the occasion. If her heart fluttered slightly, and her colour rose perceptibly, this only enhanced her beauty. Her husband's eye was fixed upon her, helping her to control any disturbing feelings she might under the circumstances naturally experience. He had been unusually taciturn all day and rather like his old, unregenerate self, and this she attributed, whether rightly or wrongly, to re-awakened jealousy of Colonel Carmichael. But, even supposing she were correct in her surmise, Lord Lillburne might have saved himself any jealous forecasts, for, as far as Hugh was concerned, a complete change had come over Mabel since they had parted. At that time she had not only desired, but passionately pleaded, for a continuance of his friendship. Now she would infinitely have preferred never seeing him again, for she was conscious how completely she had failed in profitting by that wise and kindly counsel his

interest in her happiness had prompted him to offer. Yet as she heard the well-known tones of a voice that had once appealed to her so earnestly and pathetically to bear more patiently the life she had deliberately chosen for herself, addressing her in calm words of friendliest greeting, she was considerably moved, and it was with difficulty she regained her composure sufficiently to reply,

'Had I known sooner you were to dine here, I should not have been the last to welcome you.'

'Thank you, Lady Lillburne; time, I am glad to say, has made no change in your appearance. It has been rougher in its treatment of me.'

Turning quickly to Lord Lillburne, the darkness of whose countenance rather discredited Shelah's statement of his improved character, Hugh held out his hand, saying,

'Shelah's letters have always contained such warm acknowledgment of your great kindness to her, Lord Lillburne, that I feel as if we were friends of long standing. I thank you most heartily for your kind care and protection of my ward.'

There was such determined appropriation of Shelah implied in these words that it conveyed its meaning to both Lady Ballina and Dick Thornton.

'He is an autocratic prig,' gloomily reflected Dick.

'He intends to assert his authority,' sullenly muttered Lady Ballina, while in Lord Lillburne's opinion there was something so frank and manly in Colonel Carmichael's appearance and address that he completely thawed, and, immensely gratified that Shelah should have made honourable mention of him to one whose good opinion was worth retaining, he said, with the greatest cordiality,

'To be reckoned one of Miss Fitz-Maurice's friends, Colonel Carmichael, I consider the highest privilege, I can assure you.'

'Thank you, Lord Lillburne,' said Shelah, making a pretty little curtsey; 'when I want a character I shall always call upon you to give it, for you magnify all my small virtues and never see my numerous failings.'

'How can one see what has no existence?' he replied, smiling.

Irritated at Shelah being the centre of attraction, envious at all times of the admiration she elicited, Lady Lillburne moved towards her hostess, to whom as yet she had vouchsafed no word, and holding out a hand and arm of exquisite beauty, the hand guiltless of all rings, while her arm was adorned with but one brace-

let, a circlet of rubies, she viewed her hostess, who was loaded with jewels, critically from head to foot as they shook hands, observing carelessly,

'You are dazzling to-night, my dear lady. The diamond mines of Golconda must be quite exhausted. But, as we cannot feed upon jewels, I do hope dinner will soon be announced, for I am positively starving.'

'Dinner was ordered, as you must be aware, for half-past eight. It is now ten minutes to nine. If the dinner is spoilt, you have only yourself to thank.' Lady Ballina spoke in cold, measured tones.

Surprised at the audacity of this reply from one who was usually all subservience to her slightest utterance, Lady Lillburne looked at her hostess in unfeigned surprise. Then, elevating her eyebrows and slightly shrugging her shoulders, she glanced at the clock and replied, coolly,

'Ah! am I late? But your chef Guerin, as he used to live with us, is quite accustomed to my dilatory habits, and will, I am sure, be equal to the emergency.' Before her hostess, who was boiling with indignation, could make any reply to this impertinence, Lady Lillburne continued, 'By-the-by, Lady P—— has refused me the invitation to her Saturdays you wished for.

She declares she will receive no one who has not previously been presented at Court. She is more exclusive than Her Majesty's self, and weeds even the royal list mercilessly. The fact is, my dear creature,'—resuming the patronising tone,—'you have no chance of effecting an entrance into that exclusive house until Shelah comes out. Then,' she continued, airily, '*autre chose*. She will be the magic "Open Sesame" by whose spell doors now hopelessly closed to you will be gladly thrown open. But is dinner never coming?'

That Lady Ballina was well aware of the truth of the words so unkindly spoken, made them none the less unpalatable. She also had a firm conviction Lady Lillburne had never made the slightest exertion to procure her the coveted invitation. She was suffocating with indignation, and would inevitably have made some furious retort to her guest's sarcastic remarks, had not dinner, fortunately, at the moment been announced. As it was, she cast a quick glance of malicious triumph towards the casket containing her adversary's ill-fated letter, and upon which such momentous issues hung. Had Lady Lillburne been cognisant of this fact, she would most certainly have held that little member which often causes a great fire under firmer con-

trol, and spared herself Lady Ballina's ill-natured sarcasms. It was the consciousness of how completely she had the unfortunate Mabel in her power that enabled Lady Ballina, as dinner was announced, to assume an attitude of dignity, and to say, calmly,

'I am sure, Lord Lillburne, you will waive your privileges for one evening in favour of our returned hero, and permit Colonel Carmichael to hand me in to dinner.'

Lady Ballina always said 'hand' instead of 'take,' notwithstanding she had several times been brought severely to task on this point by Lady Lillburne.

'With the greatest pleasure,' replied Lord Lillburne, with clumsy gallantry, as he gave his arm to Shelah, 'since it affords me this pleasure.'

Shelah and Hugh looked at each other and smiled.

'And who is to hand me in to dinner?' asked Lady Lillburne, with pronounced emphasis on the objectionable word.

Her hostess became scarlet; the little stab meant to wound had taken effect, and the expression of her face was anything but amiable as she replied,

'Captain Thornton, and I am sure this arrangement will coincide with your wishes.'

The slightest tinge of colour came into Lady Lillburne's face at this remark, increased by her husband suddenly turning and looking at her with an expression of wild inquiry. Then he moved quickly on with Shelah. As Mabel followed with Captain Thornton, she whispered, hurriedly,

'Did you get my letter? You will come to the ball to-night?'

He started as though he had been shot. Good heavens! what had become of that unread letter? He remained silent from a sense of remorse at his carelessness and imprudence, and she continued,

'Why don't you answer? Surely you received it? I had no other means of sending it save by Shelah. Lillburne has never left me all day, and has been so cross and disagreeable.'

Shelah's name had roused Dick from the perplexity and annoyance overwhelming him at his thoughtlessness, and he answered, gloomily,

'I am at a loss to understand why you made use of Miss Fitz-Maurice as your emissary. I cannot go to the ball to-night, as I have promised my mother to remain at the one she patronises.'

Irritated and wounded by his answer, Lady Lillburne was about to make an angry retort, when suddenly a great commotion took place in

the hall, and, turning to see what occasioned it, there, to the astonishment and amusement of all, stood Bridget, who, in order to catch a glimpse of the returned Crimean hero, had ensconced herself, as she imagined, discreetly out of sight. But, when Colonel Carmichael passed with Lady Ballina on his arm, in the excitement of the moment she protruded her head a little too far, and was instantly perceived by Hugh, who rather unceremoniously dropped his hostess's arm, and, leaving her, speechless with indignation, stranded in the hall, dragged Bridget forward, and, shaking her hand cordially, he expressed his pleasure at seeing her again, while she—regardless of Lady Ballina's angry countenance, and the tittering of the numerous powdered footmen looking on—exhausted herself in showering blessings on his head, with all the vehemence of expression characteristic of her nationality. As Colonel Carmichael, highly-amused, made no attempt to shorten her ecstasy, Lady Ballina, who was fuming, observed stiffly,

'Perhaps, if Bridget has exhausted her vocabulary of blessings, you will kindly remember we are all waiting your pleasure, Colonel Carmichael.'

'A thousand pardons, Lady Ballina,' said Hugh, giving her his arm, 'but you would excuse my apparent rudeness if you knew what pleasure

it has given me to see again this faithful friend of Shelah's.'

Lady Ballina made no response, but cast a withering glance at Bridget, upon whom it fell innocuously. For as assuredly as Lady Ballina believed she held Lady Lillburne in her power was Bridget equally certain she held Lady Ballina in hers.

CHAPTER XII.

Observing his hostess was considerably ruffled, and calling himself to account for unintentional rudeness, Colonel Carmichael, as soon as they sat down to dinner, set himself assiduously to work to wipe away all recollection of his offence. 'Be pitiful—be courteous,' was a precept he habitually acted upon, and in this instance it met with its reward; for, beneath the influence of his well-intentioned and easy flow of conversation, Lady Ballina's wounded susceptibilities were soothingly healed, and she became pleasantly responsive to the efforts made to entertain her, happily unaware that it was not solely for her delectation that Colonel Carmichael was conversing so brilliantly. It was Shelah's presence, the consciousness that she was giving all her attention to his words, that urged him on to fresh efforts of agreeable conversation. Even Lady Lillburne, momentarily forgetting what was always to her the centre of attraction, self, ceased to babble in

undertones to Captain Thornton, and almost unconsciously gave some heed to the gallant soldier's account of heart-stirring battles, still fresh in the memory of all hearts and minds. If, hopelessly depressed, Dick Thornton failed to rise with elastic cheerfulness to the occasion, those present, with the exception of Lady Lillburne, were too occupied with their own thoughts and affairs to note his extreme depression, or if she—as she listened to Hugh's voice, at once manly and melodious, and noted the expression of his noble features, lit up with a soldier's enthusiasm for his profession, as he made clear to Lord Lillburne certain tactics of the English army during the late campaign—reflected, with a passing pang of regret for the past, what a contrast he presented to her dark-visaged husband, the expression of such a feeling was not made visible on her face.

And what might Lord Lillburne's fugitive reflections be as he found himself engaged in such familiar conversation with one of whom he had once been furiously jealous? They were strange, and certainly not complimentary to his wife.

He was marvelling how a man of Hugh's stamp could ever have been attracted by a woman like Mabel. Then he mentally smiled at his own thought, for had he not himself sur-

rendered to her potent power of fascination? Had he not adored her with passionate ardour? Did he not still love her deeply and fervently, notwithstanding all her past frivolity, coldness, and indifference to his affection? But had not everything changed for the better?—were not their lives much happier? Yes, he was full of hope for the future. They certainly had had a breezy quarrel this very day, but he was to blame, he well knew. He was no longer jealous of Colonel Carmichael, as she thought might be the case; such a man would and could never give cause of jealousy to the veriest Othello of a husband: but he had seen, with surprise, Mabel —unaware he was in the room—give a letter to Shelah, and heard her say, hastily, she was to deliver it to Captain Thornton. Light as air a suspicion, dismissed as soon as it was entertained, had flashed into his mind; but it had recalled the memory of past artifice on Mabel's part, and with it a sudden fit of his bygone temper. This he regretted the more from having had no time to confess his error previous to Lady Ballina's dinner. With recollection of his fault, contrition arose, and he looked across the table at his beautiful wife, wishing to give her some amicable token of his affection and penitence. He was unable to attract her attention, for she had just detected

that Colonel Carmichael and Captain Thornton both wore the same coloured rose-bud—Marshal Niel's of great loveliness—and, knowing the flowers came from Shelah's home, she felt certain she alone could have been the giver of these floral decorations. Captain Thornton's low spirits had not escaped her observation, nor how constantly his eyes were fixed on Shelah as he made fruitless endeavours to engage her in conversation, while he was wholly inattentive to her own remarks. That her power over him had long been weakened she well knew, but never had his apathy and total indifference to her presence been so marked as on this evening. Mabel's wounded vanity and her jealousy of her young rival were at fever-heat. Piqued and angry as a vain, foolish woman alone can be under such neglect, she determined to revenge herself in the way most calculated to annoy Dick Thornton. Bending slightly forward, she looked fixedly at Shelah, and said, in a voice audible enough to be heard by all,

'You are indiscriminate, Shelah, in the favours you accord your admirers. A lack of discrimination that lessens their value. I think I must give you a lesson in the subtle art of flirtation before you come out.'

As far as Shelah was concerned, Lady Lill-

burne's spiteful dart fell harmlessly; for, opening her eyes very wide in astonishment, she replied, with a blushing face,

'I don't know what you mean, Lady Lillburne. I have no wish to be instructed in the art of flirtation. A flirt, as far as I understand the meaning of the word, means one who is both vain and silly.'

Lady Lillburne started, and her colour deepened. Perfectly unintentionally, without a spice of malice, Shelah had defeated the attack made upon her.

'You have evidently studied this subject to advantage, Shelah. No woman who respects herself could be a flirt,' observed Lord Lillburne, in his sternest manner.

He had understood his wife's allusion, but was at a loss to comprehend the motive of her having made it. She knew his wishes on this subject, what could be more desirable than that Shelah should distinguish Dick Thornton by marks of her favour? while it was unwise to call the attention of others to her having done so.

'Don't be so awfully solemn, Lillburne. Shelah would not have committed a crime even if she had florally decorated both her admirers. Though I should have thought, under existing circumstances, she would have kept such marks

of her favour solely for the hero of the evening.'

As she spoke, Colonel Carmichael looked at Shelah with a grave, puzzled glance. A quick remembrance of Lady Ballina's assertion of the intimacy existing between her and Captain Thornton, whose face at this moment displayed considerable confusion, crossed his mind; nor was his disturbance lessened by observing Shelah's heightened colour, who, though not understanding the drift of Lady Lillburne's words, was much disconcerted, for she had the disquieting conviction that every eye was fixed upon her. With a timid little smile, she said,

'I have no recollection of having given you one of my roses, Captain Thornton; though, had you asked me, I would willingly have done so.'

'You did not honour me so far as to give me one, and I did not venture to ask for it,' he replied, looking at her rather sadly.

'It is a stolen treasure, then,' observed Lady Lillburne, quickly. 'And, as it can have no value in your eyes, you can give it to me, for I forgot to take those prepared for my adornment.'

'Excuse me—though stolen, I should prefer not to part with this flower, for I value the hand that has touched it.'

He glanced at Shelah as he spoke, and there was defiance in both his words and manner—a

sort of desperation, the evidence of a determination to free himself from his past bondage, once so fatally fascinating. Sinful passion was dead in his breast, where now reigned supreme a deep, pure, and hopeless love.

Humiliated beyond bearing, stung by words that assured Mabel her reign was ended for ever, and unconscious her husband was watching her intently, striving to catch every word she uttered, she lost all self-control, and in a voice quivering with passionate emotion she said, in an ill-repressed whisper,

'You were not always so unmindful of a request of mine.'

Before Captain Thornton could reply, Colonel Carmichael, who had been lost in deep thought, suddenly exclaimed, in a voice of such alarm as to arouse the attention of all present,

'Lord Lillburne is ill.'

His appearance was indeed rather alarming, he was very pale, and convulsively clutched the table in front of him; but on hearing Hugh's exclamation, and observing the frightened looks of those around him, he imperatively waived his hand as though indicating he wished no attention paid him; and after a few moments he seemed completely to have recovered himself. But what sudden enlightenment had broken

in on his mind, vibrating through his whole being with the strength of an electric shock, and raising suspicions of so dark a nature as to occasion such symptoms of physical distress? Mabel, his wife, was jealous of Shelah! Of the bride he had singled out for Dick Thornton, of the attentions he paid her, of the innocent proof she had given him of her appreciation of those attentions! It was but for a few moments that Lord Lillburne allowed these thoughts to disturb him, then he hurled them from him. Mabel was vain, frivolous, loved admiration, it was no deep belief in her faith and sincerity that made him take calmer counsel with himself. But, if he suspected her, he must also include the man he had treated like a son in his suspicions, who had, moreover, never dissented from the happy future he had planned out for him, and for whom Shelah had such evident attraction. Actions involve time—diverse and innumerable thoughts, with all their train of direst possibilities, pass through the brain with lightning speed, and before Lady Lillburne, who was terribly frightened at witnessing her husband's emotion, had risen from her seat to go to his succour, he had recovered perfect calmness, and said, with a forced laugh,

'Your conjugal anxiety may be abated, Mabel,

I am all right again, and make many apologies for having alarmed you all.'

He gulped down a glass of water, then turning to Shelah made a bantering remark on her determination to deny having bestowed a mark of her favour on Dick Thornton, adding it was most ungracious on her part, seeing the value he placed on her gift.

Deeply vexed at his pertinacity on the subject, Shelah would have again disowned having given a flower to Captain Thornton, had not Lady Ballina deemed it expedient to give the signal for the ladies to retire. Arrived in the drawing-room, Shelah after a few minutes crept away, leaving her step-mother and Lady Lillburne alone, for she was aware that during their discussions her absence was often preferred to her company. Indeed, on several occasions Mabel had said, in her easy, good-natured way,

'Now, Shelah dear, we might say things not good for you to hear; so like a dear girl go and have a gossip with that excellent creature Bridget.'

Shelah generally found Bridget's conversation quite as edifying as that of the two ladies she had left, and infinitely preferred it to her step-mother's or Lady Lillburne's. She used to weary of their eternal discussions about dress

and society, varied by scraps of gossip and scandal, which would even in her presence inadvertently crop up, and occasion bickerings and differences of opinion.

When she entered her own room, Shelah was not sorry to find Bridget was still downstairs at supper. She wished to be alone. She had so much to meditate over—thoughts had been forced into her mind, strange and new. And as she sat at the open window gazing down on the whirling life beneath her, and absently watched the throng of carriages rushing to and fro, conveying pleasure-seekers to their varied scenes of gaiety, her heart, which a few hours previously had been so light and happy, peaceful as the stars shining above her head, now felt hot and restless, full of disquietude, for numerous thoughts and reflections, born of the incidents of the evening, were flooding and disturbing her soul.

Hitherto, especially since her father's death, she had been entirely absorbed by the one affection left her—an affection that, from the extreme loneliness of her position, absence had intensified—a feeling so ardent and supreme as to leave no room for girlish flutterings of incipient vanity, dreams of prospective admirers, or thoughts of how her personality might affect

others. Now all was changed, her eyes had been opened, and most unwillingly she had been forced to taste the apple of knowledge—knowledge that would have been very delightful to most other girls, but to her was only startling and disagreeable. Sudden enlightenment had come to her as to what others might think of her friendship with Captain Thornton. Lady Lillburne had more than intimated in Hugh's presence that she, Shelah, was that contemptible character, a flirt. Though alone, she coloured with indignant protest against this odious accusation. She and Captain Thornton had been such good friends ever since they had known each other. He had been like a brother in his kindness to her. To think of him in any other light had never entered her head. She could explain everything to Hugh. He must not think ill of her. As she thus meditated, tears came into her eyes, and she determined in future to be much more guarded in her relations with Captain Thornton, a resolution that gained strength as she recalled one or two passages in their intercourse to which before she had given no heed. But surely, had she been guilty of any indiscretion, Lady Ballina might have warned her. How terribly alone she was in the world! but, joyful reflection, Hugh had returned, and

she would never again lack guide or counsellor. And, with this comforting remembrance to brace up her spirits, she returned to the drawing-room.

Between the two ladies she had left there, after a few forced desultory remarks on either side, silence had reigned. Neither were inclined for conversation. Lady Ballina was brooding over Lady Lillburne's impertinences, and, at the same time, maliciously reflecting on the unworthy means she had gained of revenging herself; while Mabel, having quite forgotten, as people often do, that she had given ground for offence, was plunged in other thoughts. She had been alarmed by her husband's illness at dinner, and mortified by Captain Thornton's manner, and the renewed evidence of his admiration for Shelah. Then she dreaded that Hugh might have heard some word of gossip that would lower her in his eyes, and, notwithstanding she had failed to profit by his counsel, she deprecated the thought of entirely losing his good opinion. He might allude to the past confidences she had made him, if he still felt interested in her, and she well knew, though she endeavoured to make others believe differently, that she had no longer the slightest ground of complaint against her husband, who was entirely changed, and allowed her the most unfettered

liberty of action, hoping by this confidence and trust to win her in the end completely to himself. Caring nothing for those amusements in which she took unflagging pleasure, he rarely accompanied her into society except when they dined out, and the world, judging as it only can and generally does from what it sees, decided that that madman Lillburne, who had once been so furiously jealous of his lovely wife, no longer cared for her, and was indifferent to what she did, therefore, whatever happened, he had only himself to blame. And the world was very kind to Lady Lillburne. She was so beautiful, so good-natured, never criticising or occupying herself with her neighbours' affairs. Perhaps, conscious she was living in rather a brittle house herself, she refrained from casting stones at others. Lady Ballina, who had been observing her guest for some minutes, roused her out of unpleasant dreaming by saying, suddenly,

'If you have had your nap, you had better wake up, for the gentlemen will be here immediately.'

Mabel started, opened her blue eyes that she had half-closed, and laughed as she replied,

'Forgive me for being so rude, but I was up so late last night, and indeed I thought *you* were asleep, and refrained from disturbing you. I never sleep after dinner.'

'I was lost in thought, Lady Lillburne. I was wondering what could have occasioned your husband's sudden attack.'

'I am quite at a loss to understand it myself. He was perfectly well when we left home.'

'Then you can in no way account for so peculiar a seizure?'

'How can I account for it? A sudden attack of indigestion, most likely.'

'I should attribute it to mental emotion,' stiffly observed Lady Ballina.

'Mental fiddlesticks, my dear lady! What on earth was there to emotionise poor Lillburne's mind, which is wholly occupied at present with utilitarian measures connected with drainage?'

'Oh, of course I may be mistaken; but of this I am quite sure, that he was not pleased at your drawing general attention to the relations existing between Shelah and Captain Thornton.'

'I was not aware of any existing between them,' drily responded Lady Lillburne.

'Do you mean to say you are blind to the fact that he is desperately in love with her? And you must know it is your husband's most ardent desire that a marriage should take place between them. He has told me so.'

'I know Lillburne has formed some foolish

idea on this subject, but I wholly contradict your first statement. Captain Thornton cares no more about Shelah than he does about you. It is much more evident to me that Colonel Carmichael is in love with her, and she is pretty certain to reciprocate this feeling when she becomes aware of it, for she thinks and cares for no one else.'

Lady Lillburne's eyes were glittering with suppressed anger, while her enemy was perfectly calm and cool.

Shelah's entrance fortunately closed a discussion likely to prove stormy, and she was almost immediately followed by the gentlemen, when Captain Thornton at once joined her at the piano, where she was sorting music, while Hugh went straight up to Lady Lillburne and sat down by her. Lady Ballina, accustomed to see others preferred to herself, occupied herself with a piece of work, occasionally addressing a remark to Lord Lillburne, who looked grave and preoccupied, but his countenance brightened on observing that Dick Thornton was conversing earnestly with Shelah. This was as it should be, and he determined to speak to Colonel Carmichael the following day on the subject he had so much at heart, and desired with feverish anxiety to hurry to a definite conclusion.

CHAPTER XIII.

PURPOSELY had Colonel Carmichael avoided following the impulse prompting him, on his entrance into the drawing-room, to join Shelah, notwithstanding her speaking glance had invited him to do so. Whatever were the feelings he entertained for her, he had no intention of making them evident to others until assured of hers. Circumstances had occurred during dinner tending to rekindle all his doubts and fears respecting her relations with Captain Thornton. And only as these fears and doubts received elucidation could his future actions be guided. She was so young, and might misunderstand her own feelings. As yet, but a few words of common courtesy had passed between him and Lady Lillburne, and, considering their past relations, the confidences she had made him, and the unhappy frame of mind in which he had left her on his departure for the Crimea, it was but natural that he should feel kindly concerned in her present welfare.

As he sat down beside her, she glanced up at him nervously. She had not forgotten his downright way of attacking any topic of converse he was determined to pursue, and how impossible she had always found it to sustain an acted part in his presence. All desire for his stern friendship, anxiety to arouse his sympathy, had long since evaporated. She would have given worlds to have avoided all conversation with him, and had given Dick Thornton an imploring sign to come and speak to her. But he was deep in conversation with Shelah, and it passed unnoticed. Not so by Hugh. He had observed that sign, and his purpose was strengthened. For an instant, however, his heart smote him for the evil suspicions, so lowering to her he had once loved, that had found place in his mind. But these suspicions involved Shelah's happiness, and must be set at rest; and, as this reflection pressed on him, his half-formed purpose took the shape of settled resolution. His momentary silence, however, while increasing Mabel's nervousness, gave her an opportunity of initiating the subject of conversation, and, sweeping her eyes up at him, she said, with nervous haste,

'It must seem strange to you to find everything so changed since you went away. Poor

Lord Ballina gone—Shelah with a step-mother, and grown up into a young lady—and you her guardian. How do you enjoy the prospect of your new responsibilities? Do you intend to exert your authority with great severity?' she asked, with attempted playfulness.

'I do not imagine my responsibilities will be overwhelming,' he replied, looking with a smile in the direction of Shelah and Dick Thornton. 'As to authority, you forget Shelah has known me nearly all her life. There can be no question of authority; affection and mutual trust will, I hope, alone be the bond cementing all our relations towards each other. Have you not proved yourself that there is none so efficacious in promoting the harmony of daily life? Have you nothing to tell me on this subject, Lady Lillburne? Believe me, though our correspondence soon dropped—and this from no fault on my side, for you never answered my last letters—your welfare has never ceased to be a subject of interest to me, and it was with the truest satisfaction I heard from Shelah how much brighter and happier is your life. She tells me Lord Lillburne is a different man.'

Hugh spoke in low tones of friendliest interest in her he addressed. It was impossible for him not to feel deeply moved, as he found himself

again thrown in proximity to this beautiful woman, whom he had once looked upon as his future wife, and whose career for good or evil had, he feared, been trembling in the balance,—was perhaps still; and anxiously he sought for some proof that his fears were groundless. But, if there is no sap in the root of the tree, the life-giving rays of the hottest sun cannot enliven the tree itself; and Mabel's soul was sapless, no spark could be elicited from it in its present deadened state of worldly absorption and selfishness. Alas, the dangerous flirtation she had embarked upon in moments of vanity and idleness still held her in thrall, and had received fresh and dangerous energy as she recognised that, on Dick Thornton's side, his infatuation and admiration for her had died out completely, and been replaced by a deeper and holier affection —an affection leading him day by day further away from her, and making him bitterly repent that past infatuation, which now appeared to him in its true colours, as a breach of the confidence placed in him by Lord Lillburne. In her present frame of mind, nothing could have been more unpalatable to Mabel than Hugh's praises of her husband. With a little laugh, she replied, evasively,

'Perfection as no doubt you, and indeed

everyone, considers Shelah, you must not take all the charitable judgments she forms of her neighbours as correct. Lillburne's admiration for her is so extreme that she naturally views all he does through rose-coloured glasses.'

'Am I to understand, then, that your life is no happier than it was? It would grieve me infinitely to think so.'

'Not quite that, Lillburne certainly has given up acting as a marital detective. Having found that conjugal tyranny is out of fashion, and only exposes him to ridicule, he does not hamper all my actions as when we were first married.'

'You will not allow that he is actuated by any better motives. And yet Shelah is a clear discerner of character, Lady Lillburne.'

'Now really, Colonel Carmichael,' she hotly replied, 'you must allow me to be a better judge in this matter than Shelah.'

'You certainly ought to be,' he replied, drily.

'Of course I ought. Why, only this very afternoon, his temper was something dreadful, in consequence of my telling him we were to meet you at dinner.'

She glanced up at him with a little coquetry. His evident desire to ascertain if she was on good terms with her husband had, notwithstanding her own changed feeling towards Colonel Car-

michael, galled her, as a proof of how calm and devoid of all soft sentiment, how purely friendly was the interest he took in her. Lady Lillburne wished the whole world to adore her. That coquettish glance was not lost upon Hugh, but he only smiled ironically as he said, somewhat contemptuously,

'Do you mean to infer that Lord Lillburne does me the honour of being jealous of me? Surely, in marrying him, you gave the strongest evidence that there could never be any occasion for him to entertain such a feeling, as far as I am concerned. Nor does it exist, Lady Lillburne. He has not once turned his eyes in our direction, and apparently is wholly occupied watching Captain Thornton and Shelah.'

He glanced in their direction as he spoke, for his loved one had just taken her seat at the piano, and with downcast eyes and a blushing countenance was listening to Dick's whispered words, who was evidently making her some urgent request. Lady Lillburne started, as Hugh called her attention to them, and an expression of anger and annoyance passed over her face. Colonel Carmichael observed it, but continued steadily,

'This young man seems very intimate in Lady Ballina's house. He and Shelah are evidently

great friends. Any information you can give me respecting him will be acceptable, for, as Shelah's guardian, it behoves me to make enquiries about one who seems on such intimate terms with her.'

The colour mounted to Lady Lillburne's face, and already deeply irritated at Captain Thornton having neglected her the whole evening, wounded in her self-love by such open neglect, forgetful of caution, she was prompted by a spirit of virulent retaliation against her faithless admirer to reply,

'This much I can tell you about Captain Thornton, he is the most accomplished flirt of his day; though Shelah has not yet made this discovery.'

A flash of indignant light shot from Hugh's eyes, his lip curled with scorn. The inference she wished her words to convey was understood as she desired. Evidently he had not come home one moment too soon, if Shelah was to be saved from infinite sorrow and wrong. Already reports inimicable to Lady Lillburne's reputation had reached Hugh in a far distant land, for scandal flies on wings of inconceivable swiftness, gaining fresh strength in its untiring flight. Yet he would never believe or heed the whispered evil against her he had once loved.

She was, he well knew, capricious, worldly, and reckless to a fault of the world's strictures, careless of the good opinion of those whose opinion alone is of value. But now he condemned her as cruelly heartless; for if she was aware of Captain Thornton's reputation, and half what the world said concerning his friendship and admiration of herself, why had she not warned this unsophisticated girl, with whom she had been living in daily intimacy, that he was only amusing himself at her expense? Whether what she said was true or false, Hugh had, however, penetrated the feminine jealousy actuating Lady Lillburne's last remark, confirming suspicions which for her sake he had endeavoured to stifle, and rousing a storm of indignation in his breast for the wrong done to Shelah.

'And has no one told Shelah that he bears this unenviable and contemptible reputation?' he asked, with deep reproach.

'I am not her chaperon, Colonel Carmichael. I refer you to Lady Ballina,' she replied, coldly.

'You are right. And, if your judgment of Captain Thornton's character is correct, she is greatly to blame for having encouraged this intimacy, and for not warning Shelah of her danger.'

'Such danger may be too sweet for her to

wish for warnings. Look at her blushing countenance at this moment.'

Mabel had completely lost her head. The sight of Captain Thornton's devotion to her young rival, combined with Hugh's warm championship of Shelah, and attributed, by Mabel, to deeper and warmer feelings, had overwhelmed her with sentiments of envy and jealousy, and prompted her to make this odious speech. As she uttered it, with a feeling almost of repulsion for the woman he had once loved, Colonel Carmichael rose from her side, and, looking at her steadily, said calmly,

'You have taught me my duty on this subject, Lady Lillburne; I thank you.' So saying, he left her and approached the piano, where Shelah was sitting, turning over the leaves of a song, while Captain Thornton hung over her with lover-like devotion.

Wistfully she had been watching Hugh as he conversed with Lady Lillburne in low tones. She had observed how deeply moved he appeared to be, how grave and almost sorrowful his countenance was as he now approached.

'Ah! he feels meeting her again. I suppose she was right when she said he would never forget—never care for anyone but her. Dear Hugh, I must never do anything to vex or

make him sorrowful.' Such were Shelah's reflections, actuating the words she uttered to Dick Thornton in clear tones, on purpose that Hugh might overhear what she said:

'No, Captain Thornton. I thank you very much, but I will not ride your horse to-morrow. You see I have some one else to consult now. Colonel Carmichael has come home to keep me in order, and as yet I do not know what his plans are for to-morrow.'

She looked up at Hugh with a glowing smile. He returned the smile, as he answered quickly,

'I trust, dear Shelah, you do not believe I have come home to order you about, or interfere with your pleasures in any way. And I beg you will make no alteration in the plans you may have formed for your amusement to-morrow with others.'

Irritated by her refusal to ride his horse, and by the unmistakable delight betokened on her countenance as Hugh approached, Dick Thornton moved away, and listlessly proceeded to make his tardy peace with Lady Lillburne. Relieved by his departure, Shelah replied, quickly,

'I have made no plans for to-morrow. Do you think I could,' she added, reproachfully, 'knowing you would be here? I wish to be directed by you in everything. To do at all

times what you consider right for me to do.'

'Even if my wishes go contrary to your inclinations, Shelah?' he asked, a little sadly.

'My inclinations and your wishes can never be at variance, Hugh.'

'I should like to think this, Shelah, for then I could never give you pain; for to cause you pain would be infinite sorrow to me.'

There was an earnestness, a depth of emotion in his voice that thrilled the girl's heart. She felt assured that, notwithstanding he might never get over his first love, she could and would still be something in his life. What that something was to be she did not in the least enquire. Self-devotion was the chief characteristic of Shelah's nature, and she had determined to devote her existence to Hugh, as she had formerly devoted it to her father,—all the love she had given him was to be transferred to Hugh. Laying her hand gently on his arm, she replied,

'You could never pain me, Hugh, except by thinking that anything you considered right for me to do, any advice you might give me, could be misinterpreted or objected to by me. You stand in my dear father's place in every way. This afternoon I fancied that you did not quite approve of my riding in the Park, that was my reason for refusing Captain Thornton's

offer of his horse, though he has been so good to me. I was sorry to appear ungracious!'

'Thank you, Shelah. Perhaps it was best, even at the disagreeable risk of hurting his feelings, that you should not ride his horse for the present. Even,' he added, tentatively, 'if you have refused his offer at some sacrifice of your own feelings. I intend to look out for a horse for you at once.'

She gazed up at him with surprise. 'At some sacrifice of her own feelings,'—what could he mean? Suddenly she recalled to mind Lady Lillburne's remarks at dinner, and blushed scarlet with annoyance and mortification. Hugh evidently believed the odious accusation hinted at by Lady Lillburne. Ah! he could, after all, give her pain, and had done so. How could she undeceive him? And how could he give credence to such malign insinuations, unless Lady Lillburne still had undue influence over him? But while she was revolving these disagreeable thoughts in her mind, and Hugh, misinterpreting her distressful blushes, was watching her with the deepest sorrow and anxiety, Lady Ballina, who had been for some time standing by them unobserved, said, blandly,

'Are we to have no music to-night, Shelah? I am sure Colonel Carmichael would like to

hear you sing a duet with Captain Thornton.'

'You sing, Shelah! You never told me of this accomplishment,' exclaimed Hugh, with vexed astonishment.

'It was a surprise I was keeping in store for you,' she replied, striving to answer calmly. 'I intended singing to you, for the first time, when we were alone—quite alone, and not until then.'

'It is never too soon to listen to what is delightful to hear, Shelah,' observed Lord Lillburne, throwing down the evening paper, behind which he had been furtively watching Dick and Shelah's proceedings with liveliest satisfaction. Approaching the pair, he continued, 'I must tell you, Colonel Carmichael, it was my young friend, Captain Thornton, who first discovered this young lady had the voice of a nightingale.'

An involuntary frown swept the face of him he addressed, as he pulled vigorously at his moustache, signs of controlled but intense displeasure well known to Shelah, and at this moment, gentle as she was, she was positively angry with her friend Lord Lillburne.

'And has Captain Thornton been the instructor as well as the discoverer of your hidden talent, Shelah?' enquired Hugh, gloomily. He was unaware himself of the severity of his tone as he spoke, and which greatly increased her

agitation. She was in despair, everything seemed to be conspiring to strengthen that distrust in her discretion she felt convinced Lady Lillburne's words had first implanted in his mind. But, before she had sufficiently recovered from the effects of his stern manner to reply, Lady Ballina said,

'Captain Thornton has been Shelah's instructor, and a very efficient master he has proved, I can assure you. I hardly know which my step-daughter has most appreciated, his singing or his riding lessons.'

This exaggerated statement had, however, roused Shelah into self-defence, and looking at Hugh with her usual frank, open expression, she said, quietly,

'Lady Ballina is rather exaggerating Captain Thornton's services. It is an insult to say I ever required any riding lessons, except what you gave me yourself,' she smiled. 'I allow Captain Thornton was kind enough to give me some hints in the management of my voice. But his instruction has long been discontinued, I have a master now.'

'But you cannot deny that Dick was the first to discover your sweet voice, Shelah. Come here, Thornton,' Lord Lillburne called out, imperatively, 'and prove to Colonel Carmichael,

by singing a duet with your ungrateful pupil, that she does owe something to your teaching.'

'Not to-night, please, dear Lord Lillburne, I cannot sing to-night,' she imploringly whispered.

Full of concern at observing tears in her eyes, and wondering what could have caused them, he at once desisted to press her further, and fortunately attention was diverted from Shelah by Lady Lillburne coming up to her husband, and saying, with a total disregard for the desire he had expressed for music,

'It is much too late for singing now; if I am to get to my ball, I must go home and dress.'

Mabel would never run any risk of crumpling the crisp freshness of her ball attire by dining in it. Innumerable changes of toilettes was the paramount occupation of her days, and as she possessed the *rénommée* of being the best-dressed woman in London, she would not run the risk of losing it.

'Are you going to the house, to the club, or to Lady Darlington's ball with me by any chance, Lillburne?' she enquired.

As we have said, he did occasionally accompany her to a ball or party if they dined out, escaping as soon as he had shaken hands with his hostess. But these occasions were few and far between. Her popularity ensured Mabel's

having some one to put on her cloak, and get her carriage. Then Dick Thornton was generally present to be of service to her in these small matters if others failed. And Lord Lillburne was only too glad to escape to the seclusion of his study and the perusal of his books; to him they were more congenial companions than most human beings.

But to-night, as Mabel addressed him, the demon of a dark suspicion that had taken possession of his mind at dinner again assaulted him. What had she been whispering to Dick Thornton just now as they sat together on the sofa? What had caused Shelah's tears? Was Mabel giving her any cause for jealousy? Was she trying to circumvent his cherished plan? He was battling strongly against the stinging insinuations of his old enemy, and striving to disbelieve that if he did accompany Mabel to this ball it would be for no other purpose but to watch her behaviour with Captain Thornton. He loathed himself for giving way to such hateful mistrust. Suddenly he turned round and said,

'Are you going to Lady Darlington's, Dick?'

'No,' he replied, doggedly. There had been a difference between him and Lady Lillburne on this subject. 'It is the night of that dance for which my mother has sent out invitations

and I have promised to lead the cotillon, for she is interested in the success of her friends' first entertainment.'

'How very good-natured your mother must be, Captain Thornton,' observed Lady Lillburne, sarcastically, 'to bother herself by inviting other people's guests. I am sorry this ball is sure to be spoilt by Lady Darlington's.' She disliked Dick's mother, for that lady had refused to be introduced to her. She did not approve of Lady Lillburne's flirtation with her son, and had the courage of her opinion, though Mabel was a much greater lady than herself. As Dick made no reply to her remark, she continued, 'And, as neither you nor Lillburne are going to Lady Darlington's, neither shall I.'

'I never said I was not going. I am perfectly prepared to go, Mabel, if you wish it,' said her husband, gravely.

'I have no wish to impose martyrdom upon you, Lillburne; I have given up all idea of going to Lady Darlington's,' she replied, ungraciously.

'In that case, we can go home together,' he said, abruptly; then, rather brusquely bidding Lady Ballina and Shelah good night, he turned to Colonel Carmichael saying, 'I much wish to have some conversation with you. Would you mind calling to-morrow at the hour that suits

you best? I shall remain in until you come.'

Lord Lillburne's face as he spoke bore an expression Shelah had not observed on it for some time, and which it grieved her to see. Hugh having with much astonishment acceded to Lord Lillburne's request, and appointed an hour for his visit, the Lillburnes took their departure, while Captain Thornton, failing to engage Shelah in a whispered conversation, did the same.

'I suppose I must wish you good-night also, Lady Ballina, but, before doing so, perhaps you, Shelah, knowing him so intimately, can throw some light on Lord Lillburne's desire to have an interview with me. I feel quite uncomfortable. Do you think he is going to call me out? I won't accept the challenge if he does, I've had enough of steel and bullets during the last two years.'

Hugh spoke with a smile; he was distressed at Shelah's saddened countenance, and hoped to recall her gaiety. But she only shook her head; unaware how closely it concerned herself, she had no curiosity on the subject of their interview. She was thinking of Hugh, and him only, and said earnestly, as he held her hand in his,

'You will come early, very early to-morrow?'

'Immediately after breakfast. To breakfast, if you like.'

'Ah! that will be best,' with a bright smile.

CHAPTER XIV.

SHELAH being aware that her step-mother, notwithstanding a great love of display, was much given to petty economies, and would therefore wait to see all the candles extinguished immediately after her guests' departure, bade her a hasty good-night and fled to her own apartment. She also desired to escape the invariable nagging at her retainers, for fancied or real neglect of duty, that always followed one of Lady Ballina's entertainments, and the fierce arguments which arose in consequence between her and the butler, ending in his ever making the same observation, 'That he had been in the Dook of Glamorgan's service for twenty years, and if he did not understand his duty her ladyship had better look elsewhere,'—a threat that always terminated the conflict; for Lady Ballina —who, in consequence of her rigid and worrying economy in matters of detail, had found considerable difficulty in prevailing on her servants to remain with her—had no desire for change.

After a little conversation with Bridget on the more insignificant events of the evening, Shelah dismissed her attendant, and having loosened the luxuriant tresses of her soft, fair hair, and replaced her evening attire by a flowing white dressing-gown, she blew out the candles and resumed the seat she had previously occupied at the open window. It was one she particularly favoured, for it commanded a view of Buckingham Palace Gardens and the Park beyond, while above the more distant trees, on clear days, could be discerned the time-honoured towers of Westminster Abbey. If you could close your ears to the never-ceasing roar of the traffic below, it was almost like looking out on the country, Shelah often thought, as she meditated in this her favourite retreat.

It was a hot oppressive night, and one not promising restful repose to a spirit already discomposed. A waning moon, struggling to assert itself through the heavy atmosphere, cast an uncertain light into the room where the girl sat, lost in reflection, endeavouring to piece together for her better comprehension the events of the past evening. She was calling herself severely to task for any possible encouragement she might have given Dick Thornton to whisper words into her ear such as he had never done before,

and the import of which she could not, free from vanity though she was, misunderstand. But, the more she reflected on the subject, the less did her sensitive conscience accuse her of wrong-doing. For how could she have given him any encouragement to speak as he had spoken, seeing she had never thought of him except as the kindest of friends? And perhaps after all his words meant nothing. Lady Ballina had frequently said in her hearing, she supposed by way of warning, that a girl's value of herself frequently led her to attach greater importance to men's attentions than they were intended to convey. And on this occasion Shelah was quite ready to accept her step-mother's verdict on a subject of which until now she had had no personal experience. It was far pleasanter for her to credit Captain Thornton with being a flirt than that others should consider her guilty of so contemptible a weakness, especially Hugh. But at the same time she was thoroughly determined to make Captain Thornton understand that, if he wished to divert himself by flirting, it should not be with her. With an effort she dismissed the unpleasant topic from her mind, and, falling into a different train of meditation, her thoughts reverted to Hugh. The fear of having incurred his disapprobation

had been partially swept away by his manner when they parted, but, though she still remained considerably puzzled by some things in his words and manner that appeared to her unaccountably strange, so pleasant and sweet, on the whole, were her reflections respecting him that she became perfectly oblivious of the lateness of the hour, and of the stillness beginning to pervade the hitherto tumultuous city, until reminded of these facts by the sudden entrance of her step-mother, bearing a strong resemblance to Lady Macbeth, for she was attired in a flowing crimson velvet wrapper, and held a lighted candle in her hand. This she dropped with a scream on perceiving the white-robed figure sitting so still and motionless at the window—'in maiden meditation fancy free,'—and upon whom the moon's rays cast a mysterious light, giving her certainly a rather unearthly appearance. Most people would, however, have considered the girl made a very attractive picture; not so Lady Ballina, who exclaimed, angrily,

'How eccentric you are, Shelah! You look exactly like a ghost. Why on earth are you mooning in the dark? It is highly improper for any young lady to be sitting at an open window at this time of night in her dressing-gown. Shut it at once.'

Without immediate reply, Shelah closed the window, picked up the candle from the carpet, and, having placed it on a table, said, with a slight smile and a little innocent malice,

'As I was not sleepy, and had no inclination to read, I blew the candles out, as I know you do not approve of waste, and then—one can think so much better in the dark. But to pay me a visit at this hour of the night you must have something very particular to say, Lady Ballina.'

Shelah sighed a little wearily. She felt convinced that 'something particular' would, as it always was where her step-mother was concerned, include something disagreeable.

'Yes, I have something very particular to say to you. I consider that you displayed both affectation and temper in refusing to sing at Lord Lillburne's request to-night.'

'I do not think he so interpreted my refusal —he is too kind.'

'I am well aware he is most lenient in his judgment of your eccentricities at all times. Others may judge differently. You have been spoilt all your life. Your father——'

'How dare you mention his name to me!' exclaimed Shelah, flinging the hair back from her face, and looking at Lady Ballina with indig-

nant protest. 'We have long decided his loved name was never to be mentioned between us—never, never. If in any way I have unconsciously erred to-night, it will not only be kind, but your duty to point out my errors to me. What have I done incurring reproach? Tell me.'

'It is a pity you are so hot-tempered, Shelah,' replied Lady Ballina; 'it makes it very difficult and unpleasant at all times for me to fulfil my duty towards you.' As Shelah made no reply to an accusation often made before, the speaker was forced to continue—'I do not say you have incurred reproach exactly, but you must remember you are now a woman, and that actions and a manner perfectly suitable in your relations with your guardian when you were a child are so no longer, and, if persisted in, may be misinterpreted not only by him, but by others.'

Shelah had been tapping her pretty, unstockinged foot rather impatiently on the carpet during her step-mother's exordium; when it was concluded, though her heart was beating fast, she said, steadily,

'In what way could Hugh misinterpret any action of mine this evening? I hardly comprehend what you mean.'

'I shall make my meaning clearer, then. You were unduly excited when talking to Colonel

Carmichael this evening. Young ladies don't place their hand on a gentleman's arm in the way you did to-night, nor converse with him in whispers, unless he is a close relation. He is none to you, remember, and is still a young man.' Shelah became scarlet; enlightenment of an unpleasant nature was indeed breaking in upon her. 'Of course,' continued Lady Ballina, 'poor Colonel Carmichael was this evening too agitated and preoccupied at once more meeting Lady Lillburne to pay much attention to anyone or anything else, and I am in hopes your breach of decorum passed unnoticed by him and others. I only wish to warn you to be more discreet and reticent in your manner with your guardian in future. And now, having relieved myself of what I consider my duty, and as I see you perfectly comprehend my meaning, I will say good-night, and leave you to reflect upon what I have said.'

So saying,—satisfied that she had for the present raised a barrier of cold decorum between Shelah and Colonel Carmichael, that would materially impede a premature understanding between them, and might also serve to encourage Shelah to favour Dick Thornton's suit,—Lady Ballina effected a hasty retreat.

Never had any woman made a greater mistake.

For a few minutes after her departure, Shelah remained perfectly motionless. Slowly she was taking in the meaning of words that, as they were spoken, had conveyed almost none, and very lovely she looked as, with one hand holding back the masses of her flowing hair from her dark eyes, she gazed into space with silent, bewildered questioning.

Rapidly the colour went and came into her face, while the soft, white cambric covering her youthful bosom rose and fell with the many palpitating emotions her step-mother's words had aroused. Twice to-night accidental circumstances had reminded her of her womanhood, and of the dignity and reserve that should walk hand in hand with it. But, while in connection with Dick Thornton she had been but little moved at this reflection, why was she now so disturbed? Ah! because to be on less familiar terms with Hugh than in former days would be, to her, most grievous sorrow; and yet, after what Lady Ballina had hinted, how could the loving familiarity that had existed between them all her life, and to the return of which she had looked forward so joyously as the only outlet of the repressed but strong affections with which heaven had endowed her, ever exist again after what Lady Ballina had said, perhaps from a

kind motive, though it was rudely and somewhat indelicately expressed. Yes, she was now a woman, and even with Hugh must comport herself with the dignity and reticence her advanced years demanded for fear of misinterpretation! And, as the remembrance of the proposal she had made Hugh to make her home with him flashed across her mind, the absurdity of such a proposition at once struck her, and she felt hot with shame at its recollection. She was too clear-witted not to see their respective positions as they now were, in a few moments. He was still too young a man for such an arrangement as she had proposed to be possible. She understood his gentle evasion of her preposterous request clearly.

'Oh,' exclaimed the girl, with sudden passion, clasping her hands together, 'when my dear father was alive I was always wishing to be grown up that I might be more to him, and now I wish I were a child again, that I might be to you what I was in days for ever gone, Hugh, dear, dearest Hugh.'

But hardly had this open expression of strong feeling passed Shelah's lips, when evidently some wholly different sentiment took possession of her, for the dreamy, saddened expression in her eyes passed away, giving place to one of

wild surprise—infinite, glad joy. By Lady Ballina's help a possibility of such overwhelming happiness, that otherwise might long have remained hidden from her, had crept into her heart, and no longer did Shelah wish for a return of her childhood, but rapturously she exulted in the consciousness of her glowing womanhood—for as a woman might she not become more, far more, to Hugh than she had ever been before? But we will not intrude further into the secrets of a young maiden's reflections, as she first discovers that she loves with a love hitherto unrevealed to her.

So overpowering was the revelation to Shelah that, though there was none to witness the birth of this mysterious knowledge pervading her whole being with such wondering astonishment, she covered her agitated face with her hands, and remained for some moments motionless. When, after a moment, she withdrew them, it was to kneel down by her bed, and clasp them together as she prayed from the depths of her pure, trusting soul that she might be allowed to make Hugh forget the sorrowful disappointment of his early life, and become his wife. Then, in joyful hope, in fullest trust her prayer would be heard, she lay down on her uncurtained bed, and, with the moonbeams fall-

ing on her sweet young face, fell into calm, untroubled sleep.

It was unfortunate that she could not impart some of her soul's peace to others. But 'they that sow the wind must reap the whirlwind,' and the desire of revenge on a fellow-creature, when indulged in and brooded over in bitterness of spirit, is not likely to ensure peaceful slumber. Thus while Shelah was blissfully sleeping beneath, we may believe, angel guardianship, her step-mother was tossing restlessly on her couch beneath the gorgeous canopy of silk and velvet, upheld by golden Cupids, under which it pleased Lady Ballina to seek repose, a prey to many disturbing reflections. She was stimulated by the occurrences of the evening to precipitate her revenge against Lady Lillburne. She would no longer remain in a state of subserviency to one who evidently found pleasure in heaping humiliation upon her. But yet to act the odious part she meditated would require the greatest discretion. Before Lord Lillburne knew of the letter she held in her possession, Shelah must be induced, by means she deemed easy to compass, to accept Captain Thornton, for whom she certainly had evinced great partiality previously to Colonel Carmichael's arrival.

While Lady Ballina was thus settling Dick's future for him, he, having searched everywhere for Lady Lillburne's note, and satisfied that he must have destroyed it with some other papers he had taken out of his pocket previous to dinner, thought no more about the matter, and, without any intention of retiring to rest, was sitting in a state of miserable despondency—smoking cigar after cigar, and deeply regretting the too tender words he had spoken to Shelah that evening in a moment of desperation—confident that their hitherto pleasant friendship, which had called out all that was highest and noblest in his character, was ended. For he had heard enough of Colonel Carmichael to be assured that, whether he himself cared for Shelah or not, he would hesitate to give his consent to her marriage with a man who had made himself notorious by his devoted attentions to a married woman.

Dick was not unaware of the world's gossip about him and Lady Lillburne, and here lay his chief error; but he had been blinded to this fact, had unheeded his mother's gentle remonstrances, until he fell in love with Shelah. Then his conduct appeared to him in a different light, and he felt he had deeply erred. Why, why had he not long ago followed the dictates of awakened conscience which had prompted

him to leave the Guards and England, and, by so doing, silence every malicious word? Why had he allowed himself to be laughed out of his good intentions by Lady Lillburne? He knew, well enough, the reason: his secret desire to remain in Shelah's vicinity until Colonel Carmichael's return. He had a feverish anxiety to witness the meeting between them—to judge what his feelings were for her, hers for him. It seemed hardly credible to Dick that she could fall in love with a man so much older than herself, whom she had known all her life; but when he saw Hugh, and witnessed their meeting, this illusive hope vanished. But, even supposing Shelah only looked upon her guardian as the loved and trusted friend of her whole life, had he not forfeited all right to the bride destined for him by Lord Lillburne, by bringing discredit on a name he was bound above all others to honour? As this thought, the outcome of true repentance, pressed forcibly upon him, he laid his head on the table and sobbed aloud, as he murmured,

'Shelah, Shelah, darling of my heart, through my own miserable folly I have lost you!'

CHAPTER XV.

FEW words passed between Lord and Lady Lillburne as they returned from dinner until they reached their own door, when he said, abruptly,

'Mabel, do you think it was politic or kind to draw general attention to Shelah and Dick Thornton this evening, before I have acquainted Colonel Carmichael with my desire for an alliance between them?'

'I cannot say I thought about the matter,' she replied, with affected carelessness; 'and I am confident, when you do speak to Colonel Carmichael on this subject, you will find his ideas run in a very different groove from yours. I am almost certain that the deep interest he has taken in Shelah, all her life, arises from his entertaining some romantic idea of marrying a girl whose mind and disposition he has moulded entirely in unison with his own.'

'I have rarely heard you express yourself better, Mabel; and there is considerable wisdom

embodied in your supposition. A man who knows the world as well as Carmichael could hardly act more wisely than in seeking to obtain, as a wife, one so little versed in its vanities and hollowness as Shelah. But I differ from you on this subject. Men rarely fall in love with a woman they have known from childhood, and the difference in their age is too considerable for Shelah to look upon Colonel Carmichael in any other light than that in which he stands towards her. Dick is evidently deeply in love with Shelah, and my conviction is that she returns his affection, though, as yet, she may not have made this discovery. In any case, remember,'—he placed his hand impressively on her arm—'I am determined that this match shall take place, and I expect you to help me in bringing it to a happy conclusion.'

Something in her husband's manner frightened Mabel—he was so like what he used to be when troubled with doubts of her truthfulness—and she made no reply until, on entering the house and finding he did not follow, she said, with surprise,

'Are you going out again?'

'Yes,' he replied, curtly.

It was a considerable time since Lord Lillburne had taken one of those nocturnal rambles,

that were sure indications of a stormy disturbance of mind; and moved by fear, or perhaps, remembering his sudden illness during dinner, with some gentler feeling, she said, nervously,

'Had you not better remain quiet, as you did not feel well at dinner?'

'I am perfectly recovered,' he replied, coldly. 'I thank you for displaying anxiety for my passing indisposition.'

He gazed at her intently for a second, as she stood beneath the lighted gas-lamp suspended from the hall ceiling. In her rich, blue-velvet cloak, with its soft white feather-trimming nestling about her delicate throat, and the diamonds gleaming in her hair, she looked very lovely,—so evidently thought her husband, for his gaze suddenly changed from searching sternness into one of sad, irrepressible longing. She quickly noticed the change, and was about to speak when he turned abruptly away, and left her standing alone in the hall in a state of frightened perplexity.

She had so long been spared all scenes of violence on his part, the tenor of her life for the last two years had flowed so smoothly, that she had drifted into a state of complete security. Her misuse of, and ingratitude for, a trust he had with difficulty constrained himself to accord

her, in hopes of drawing her closer to him, the imprudent way in which she had dragged his name through the mire for the gratification of her vain instincts, were, she knew, wholly unsuspected by him. But now she trembled; why was his manner so peculiar? Why had that dark, lowering expression, so long absent from his countenance, again returned to alarm and terrify her?

Lady Lillburne was not pondering over her own past conduct, as she slowly mounted the soft, carpeted stairs leading to her private suite of apartments, furnished with all the comfort and luxury her husband had lavished on them, but she was reflecting with considerable dread that something must have arisen to raise suspicions in his mind inimicable to her future; and, if so, her popularity in society, her position as a leader of fashion, her London house, might all be suddenly wrested from her. And none of these worldly advantages had Mabel the slightest desire to relinquish for Dick Thornton's sake, or any other man's in the whole world. Mabel was not much given to reflection, but a depressing current of thought was passing over her spirit at this moment, and she found it so unpleasant that, quickly dismissing her maid, she sought refuge from discomforting musings

by taking up a novel she had been engaged on in the afternoon, with a determination not to worry herself by meditating over disagreeable possibilities. The book occupying her attention was of that pernicious school where immorality is partially glossed over and obscured by the subtlety of false sentiment and the safe indistinctness of a foreign language. Too much of such reading had tended to lower still further a mind weak and easily impressed, though not vicious.

Determined, however, as Mabel was, not to torment herself by distressing possibilities, the disturbing current was too forcible to be resisted, and finally she flung the book impatiently to one side. Was it meeting her early lover again, remembrance of happy, by-gone days passed by his side, hallowed by his devoted love, that helped to maintain the train of melancholy thought into which she had fallen, combined with too late regret for having treated his counsel as worthless, counsel that if acted upon might have helped her to avoid a temptation she had sought rather than avoided? or was it pique and wounded vanity at finding her influence over Captain Thornton completely broken, while he was heart and soul wrapped up in another, evincing that his feelings for her had been but transient, had originated in her encouragement, and been

kept in ephemeral life by her love of admiration? for the incense of man's adoration was a craving necessity of Lady Lillburne's vacuous, aimless existence, and perhaps at this moment her most tormenting reflection was, that Captain Thornton had taken the initiative, and been the first to put an end to their intimacy, though too late alas! to avoid the gossip it had caused.

Yet, case-hardened in worldliness and folly as Mabel was, there had been moments when, moved by some extra kindness of her husband's, some unwonted act of generosity, she had been startled by brief pangs of remorse for her levity and want of consideration for his happiness. But latterly, irritated by Dick Thornton's desertion, she had been more wild and reckless in her behaviour than ever. To-night—why, she could hardly have said—she felt nervous and frightened, and as hour after hour passed, and her husband did not return, she became seriously alarmed. At last, just as dawn was breaking, she heard his step on the stairs; but, without entering her apartment, he passed straight to his dressing-room. Only partially relieved, she fell into uneasy slumber, so disturbed by vague terrors that she hailed with gladness the moment that brought the maid to her bedside with her morning cup of coffee.

Although a member of several clubs, Lord Lillburne was not a club man, but on leaving his home, instead of accomplishing the long walk he proposed taking, he did what, for him, was almost unprecedented—walked rapidly in the direction of one of the most frequented clubs. In the lively, racing set by which he was here surrounded, he was well-known by name, but personally a stranger, and as he sat down in a large arm-chair in which he was almost wholly concealed, and took up an evening paper, not one could answer the question asked by the other as to who he was. In a few moments all present, with the exception of a couple of very young men—evidently, from their button-holes and careful attire, on their way to some ball or party—adjourned to the card-room. It was not much past eleven, and these youths of fashion, having little respect for the anxieties of a hostess who sees her ball-room crowded with pretty girls mourning the tardy arrival of partners, had no intention of losing prestige as leaders of fashion by permitting the light of their vacuous countenances to shine on these forlorn damsels until midnight had struck. Believing themselves the sole occupants of the room, with an indiscretion in harmony with their youthful appearance, they began to converse in

no modulated tones as they lit their cigars.

'We have still a liberal half-hour for smoking, Crauford, before we put in an appearance at Lady Darlington's. She implored me to come early, but, 'pon my word, it is too absurd. One gets used up physically and morally before the evening's half over, if one arrives at these dances too early.'

'Perhaps one does, if one sets to work at once. I always spend the first hour in the doorway mentally selecting my partners. I generally dance with the same. Know their paces—don't you see, Lorford?'

'Rather compromising to dance with the same girls every night, don't you think, Crauford.'

'Not at all, if you only dance once with each of them—do you see? But ain't you going to the dance Mrs. Thornton is protecting, Lorford, before you go to Lady Darlington's?'

'No, I never go to those sort of entertainments. It is entirely for young ladies on their preferment, an excellent reason for absenting myself. You see I am an eligible, my dear fellow.'

'Ah! I forgot you only dance with married women. Keeps one out of hot water, I suppose, though I am not so sure of that. Look at Dick Thornton, for example. I must go to this other ball to-night; he put such pressure on me, and

he is such a good fellow one can't refuse a request of his, though it's a confounded bore. By-the-by, have you heard there has been a row between him and the lovely Lady Lillburne? and——'

Here a muffled exclamation, proceeding from the chair where the unfortunate husband of the too lovely Lady Lillburne sat, caused both the young men to glance in that direction. But, though the paper shook in Lord Lillburne's hand, he had sufficient self-command to let it drop over his ashy face. He had paid no attention to these young men's conversation until he heard Dick Thornton's familiar name mentioned in connection with that of his wife. In an instant he was preternaturally alive to every word they might utter, and fiercely determined to hear what further they had to say on a subject of such vital concern to himself.

> 'What damned moments tells he o'er
> Who dotes yet doubts, suspects yet strongly loves.'

These were indeed damned moments to Lord Lillburne, but his determination not to escape from their torment was invincible, and he remained perfectly still, for none could see the convulsive twitchings on his concealed face, caused by the violent emotion raging within his breast.

'Who on earth is that man at the end of the room who beneath a concealed physiognomy makes night hideous with his snores? I thought we were alone, Lorford.'

'And so to all intents and purposes we are, for he is too profoundly asleep to be cognisant of anything you say. So fire away, only it will be as well to omit names.'

'Well, you see, it seems Dick,' the speaker, desirous to show he was well up in the scandal he was discussing, forgot to profit by his friend's advice, and continued to speak in audible tones, 'wished his mother to ask Lady Lillburne to this ball I am going to, but she is a stiff starched sticker-up of all that is most decorous, and will give no countenance to the flirtation going on so long between Lady Lillburne and Dick, and therefore refused.'

'I told you not to mention names,' observed the more discreet Lorford. 'However, I don't wonder at that rock of propriety demurring to invite the lady in question to a ball exclusively intended for young ladies. How dull it will be. But tell me, do you know anything about the husband of the lady we are talking about?'

'Oh! he rarely goes into society, he is what they call a misanthrope. He used to be as jealous as Othello, I'm told. But like others no

longer cares, I suppose, or, finding tyranny fail, has gone into an opposite extreme, with unfavourable results. Well, Lorford, there is a wholesome lesson for us young men to be learnt from this affair,—avoid matrimony.'

Young Crauford, only just of age, evidently thought he had said a good thing, and laughed loudly at his own wit. His friend joined in the laugh, but after a moment observed, with ludicrous gravity,

'Matrimony is a mistake, I think myself, and yet Dick, who might be supposed to know better, is hurrying towards the goal. The fact is, his flirtation with Lady Lillburne has, I am told, long been at an end, and I hear he is over head and ears in love with Miss Fitz-Maurice, the new beauty, who is to come out next spring; and as women always favour Dick, and they have been thrown much together, the probabilities are she is in love with him also.'

'Then all I can say is that Thornton has played his cards uncommonly well. Miss Fitz-Maurice is—' here the speaker kissed the tips of his fingers and expanded them in the air as a token of his extended admiration of Shelah. 'I have seen her once or twice in the Park. A houri, my dear fellow,—a houri! And they say she will inherit all her step-mother's wealth.'

'My lady will hardly congratulate Dick on his good fortune. But it is past twelve, I declare, time for me to put in an appearance at Lady Darlington's. I can drop you at the other place *en passant*.'

'Thanks awfully,' replied his friend, 'I am rather impecunious, and have no objection to save my cab fare.'

Both young men rose languidly, as if the effort was rather overpowering, and left the room. As they passed Lord Lillburne's still impassive figure, death-like in its apparent repose, young Lorford observed reflectively, in a whisper to his comrade,

'I suppose that is the melancholy fashion in which some day we shall pass the evening of life. How soundly he sleeps, poor wretch!'

No sooner had the two young men left the room vacant of all but the miserable Lillburne, than he sprang to his feet as though he had received a galvanic shock, and staring around him gasped out,

'My wife—my wife—Dick Thornton! Their names thus coupled together! But no, I can't have heard aright. I am mad—mad! He is the soul of honour and truth, and she—ah! on me fall the penalty. I thought to do what was right. Curse those flippant tongues which have

traduced both! Dick is in love with Shelah—he must marry her at once! I must go home—home. I won't see her to-night. To-morrow I will settle everything.'

He fell heavily forward, as the words crossed his lips, in total unconsciousness. The noise caused by the fall of so heavy a man attracted the attention of one of the servants, who rushed in to see what had occurred. As he raised Lord Lillburne's prostrate form from the ground, a gentleman entered the room, and, seeing what had happened, hastened to his help. It was Colonel Carmichael. Deeply concerned to find the sufferer was Lord Lillburne, especially after the evidence of illness he had displayed during dinner, he was on the point of sending for medical aid when the unfortunate Lillburne opened his eyes, and, after a moment, recognising Carmichael, said, in a low voice,

'I shall be all right in a moment. Nobody must know I have been here to-night. Help me home; I know you are to be trusted.'

CHAPTER XVI.

When Shelah opened her eyes on the morning after the bewildering revelation so suddenly made known to her, she felt as though she had been born anew and had entered on another world. The fresh thoughts and hopes which had then occupied her mind returned with unabated force. All her past worries—Lady Ballina's small tyrannies—were forgotten, even her trouble about Captain Thornton weighed as nothing in comparison with the overflowing joy flooding her soul. The sweetest task in the world lay before Shelah to accomplish—to change the character of Hugh's love for her; and, full of this delightful thought, she sprang out of bed and rang for Bridget. When she entered, Shelah announced her intention of going to early service at St. Paul's, and, her toilette completed, the two sallied out together. Shelah was in the constant habit of attending the early service of this church, where she found a repose

and rest of mind not easily attainable in Lady Ballina's mansion, who had endeavoured, though unsucessfully, to deter her step-daughter encouraging, what she termed, Popish innovations, and expressed astonishment that Shelah did not find their weekly Sunday attendance at church amply sufficient for her spiritual needs.

It was a bright, summer's morning, proportionately exhilarating, and in harmony with the girl's happy frame of mind. The hot, heavy mist hanging over the city during the night had been dispelled by the beams of a strong, self-asserting sun, while a soft, western breeze tempered its power, and, fanning the lime-trees in the park, filled the air with the fragrance of their blossoms. Shelah had brought some bread with her to feed the birds on the Serpentine, and having fulfilled her intention, and finding she had still time to spare, lingered a few minutes by the water's edge to watch their movements. It was a favourite pastime with her, for she was fond of all animals, and, then, her present occupation savoured much of home pursuits at Ballina. It was here that Dick Thornton—having accidentally met her one morning engaged in her beneficent occupation, as he was returning with his battalion from exercise—had afterwards frequently joined her.

Nothing could be more harmless than these matutinal meetings, for Bridget was the strictest of chaperons, never deserting her post for a moment, yet they had become the most desired moments of Dick's life; and one of his most melancholy reflections, during the dreary hours of retrospection in which he had passed the previous night, had been that they must be for ever discontinued. For on one point his mind was made up—he would exchange from the Guards into some regiment stationed abroad. The temptation to declare his love to Shelah, to profit by the encouragement given him by Lord Lillburne, was over. He must leave the field open to one worthier of her affection than he felt himself to be. Perhaps, if Dick could have attained the complete certainty that, under no circumstances, had he a chance of winning Shelah's love, his self-inflicted banishment would not have been so hard to bear.

Unable to sleep, he had given up the attempt, and after plunging into a cold bath had crept out into the Park. Here, save for a few homeless waifs and strays who had escaped the Park-keepers' vigilance, he found solitude, and wandered aimlessly about until the moment he thought it probable Shelah would appear.

It was while sitting under one of the dismem-

bered old elms by the Serpentine that he saw her approach, dressed as she always was with the utmost simplicity in a light blue cambric. The ribbons of her straw hat fluttered in the breeze, and underneath its brim a bunch of blue forget-me-nots nestled in her bright hair. She was a picture of youth, health, and happiness. She had not seen Dick, and stood silently looking down on the ducks flocking round her; for, recognising her or her basket, they had all rushed greedily out of the water on her approach. Even the snowy swans, forgetful that their grace and dignity vanish when they forsake their own element, had waddled towards her, craning their long necks to get a peep into her basket.

In the preoccupation of her thoughts, Shelah had not reflected on the chances of meeting Dick Thornton this morning, or, if she had, felt sure that, after her manner towards him the previous evening, he would be more likely to avoid than endeavour to speak to her. She was therefore so unpleasantly startled when he accosted her that she dropped her basket, causing a general stampede among the feathered population surrounding her. This gave her time to recover herself, and, as Dick stooped to lift up the basket, she said, demurely,

'Thank you, Captain Thornton, and good-morning. Did you ever see such greedy, ungrateful creatures? Now they have all they want, they desert me at once. Look at them rushing to the water loaded with my benefits.'

'The way of the world, Miss Fitz-Maurice. Those occupied in good works must be prepared to meet with ingratitude. You are at your post unusually early this morning. Next year, when you have entered on your London campaign, you will not feel inclined to be charitable at so early an hour.'

'The campaign you allude to is one I trust never to engage in. But how ill you look,' she exclaimed, in a voice of such true concern that it thrilled Dick's heart with dangerous joy. He would not have objected to look at death's door if thereby he could awaken her sympathy, and he replied, with a gratified smile,

'Oh! I led that stupid cotillon last night, and did not get home until about three hours ago. Is not this sufficient to account for my haggard appearance?'

'Certainly if, as I also suppose, you never went to bed when you came home.'

'What was the use? I have to be at barracks almost immediately. If you are going to take a walk, may I accompany you?'

Shelah was on her guard in a moment, and she replied, gravely,

'You forget you said just now you had to be at barracks immediately. I am on my way to church, and have but just time to get there. Indeed, I think you had better go home, Captain Thornton, you look wretchedly ill.'

'Never mind my looks, Miss Fitz-Maurice, they are not worth your kind anxiety. Will you allow me to walk with you as far at St. Paul's? It is on my way to barracks.'

He glanced imploringly at Bridget as he spoke. Would she take the hint, and give him the opportunity he sought for? He did so wish to have a few moments' private conversation with Shelah! But Bridget was either obstinate or obtuse, and remained pertinaciously by her young mistress's side.

Aware, however, that a few minutes would bring them to the church-door, and that his chance of making the communication to Shelah he desired might probably never occur again, he became desperate, and regardless of Bridget's presence, whom at this moment he would willingly have flung into the Serpentine, he said, in a low agitated voice,

'I wished so much to be alone with you for a short time, but Bridget is an inexorable chap-

eron. Could you not manage to get rid of her for a few minutes?'

These whispered words increased Shelah's nervous trepidation, and she hastened her steps, saying,

'Certainly not; and I cannot stay to hear anything you may have to say, Captain Thornton. I wish you would not meet me in the Park any more, if you do it will prevent my coming here. I—I—— Do you think it is right?' she asked, suddenly, turning and fixing her eyes on him with a little indignation.

'If I have done wrong,' he answered, sadly; 'it is a wrong that I shall never repeat, Miss Fitz-Maurice. To meet you here has been one of the chief joys of my life. I have, perhaps, too inconsequently sought this pleasure, I do not deny it. But I did not come here this morning to make this confession, but to ask your forgiveness for having unintentionally offended you last night.'

'Where there is no intention of offending there can be no offence taken, and therefore no cause for forgiveness,' she replied, gently.

'That is kindly said. But, even had I offended you, I am going to place it out of my power ever to do so again, for I am soon going to leave London. I have made up my mind to

exchange from the Guards into some regiment abroad. I have long wished to go to India.'

'Oh, Captain Thornton, what has caused you to take this sudden determination? so contrary, I am sure, to your inclinations, for I know how proud of and devoted you are to your regiment. What will your mother say to your resolution?'

The kindness of the girl's heart, and the relief occasioned by finding she had been fearing a danger that did not exist, prompted Shelah to display a dangerous concern in the announcement made her. Dick's voice was a little husky as he replied,

'My mother, Miss Fitz-Maurice, will, I know, approve of what I am doing. Indeed, long ago she urged me to take the step I have now decided upon. But you are quite correct in your supposition, it is not prompted by my own inclinations. And yet, for once in my useless life, I am determined to do what is right, and to tear myself away from everything I hold most dear in this world. I am, after all, leading but a useless, worthless life in London.'

He looked at her with sad-speaking eyes. He hoped, he even ardently desired, she might divine the love he felt for her, though a sense of his own unworthiness forbade him to try his chance and declare it. But, though Shelah

coloured beneath his ardent glance, his words and earnest manner puzzled without affording her any understanding of the soft meaning they were meant to convey. They were alone now in the busy thoroughfare of Knightsbridge, for, in crossing from Albert Gate, Bridget had been separated from her charge, and, profiting by her absence, Dick continued, hurriedly,

'How everything that is pleasantest in life comes quickly to an end. Miss Fitz-Maurice, the best and happiest moments of my life have been spent in your companionship. You will remember me sometimes when I am in a far-away country, will you not?'

'Can you doubt it? But do not talk so dismally. You are not going away for ever, even if you do leave England.'

'I trust not—I hope not most fervently. But when I do return it will, I fear, be too late for the realisation of a dream of happiness I had once madly thought might be mine.' His voice shook, but they were close to the church and there was no time to prolong conversation. Suddenly seizing Shelah's hand, he whispered, in tones of intense emotion as he held it closely clasped in his, 'But however I may have blighted my own chance of happiness, whatever may happen in the future, my prayer is

that you, fairest and sweetest of womankind, may be happy. Keep what I have confided to you secret for the present. You are the first I have told of my intentions.'

He dropped her hand, and, before she could recover from the surprise caused by his words, he was gone; while Bridget, panting and breathless from the exertions she had made to join Shelah, stood by her side, reminding her mistress that the bell for service had ceased to ring. Her own religion forbade her entering an heretical place of worship, and the time intervening until Shelah's reappearance she always passed in devout prayers for her conversion to the ancient faith of her forefathers. As Shelah walked rapidly towards the church-door, she almost fell into Hugh Carmichael's arms, who was standing at the entrance. Without a word he pushed it open to allow of her entering. As he followed and closed it, he felt as though at the same moment he had shut the door for all time on the fairest hopes he had ever entertained. He could no longer doubt that Shelah cared for Captain Thornton, and oh, misery! he believed him to be not only unworthy of her, but to be trifling with her affections.

Arrived at her seat in church, Shelah, trembling from head to foot, dropped on her knees,

and, burying her face in her hands, endeavoured to join in the prayers going on, but in vain. Devout as she ever was, she could not fix her attention on the service. Her mind was in a confused whirl. The grave, searching look on Hugh's countenance, as he opened the door to let her pass, distressed her beyond bearing. What would he—could he think of her? And how could she explain? for Captain Thornton had requested her to keep secret the confidence he had just made. And, though she could no longer hesitate to believe his feelings for her were of a more serious nature than she had thought, they had been expressed in so ambiguous a manner, as gave her no right to treat them seriously. Nor had she any desire to do so, for she had nothing to give him in return, and he had solved every difficulty and annoyance his strange conduct might have entailed upon her by announcing his intention of at once leaving England. There was great consolation, notwithstanding her friendly feelings for Captain Thornton, in this recollection. But, quickly remembering how unhappy he appeared to be, she reproached herself for entertaining so selfish a thought, while, overcome with many conflicting emotions, the tears slowly trickled down her cheeks. Relieved by this wholesome outlet of

emotion, she became calmer, and, with considerable compunction for giving rein to earthly wanderings while in church, made a struggle to return to a frame of mind more suitable to the sacred edifice in which she knelt, when she was much dismayed to find the service concluded, and the clergyman giving the parting blessing.

She remained in silent prayer for a few minutes afterwards, then, brushing the lingering tears from her eyes, rose and left the church, with the certainty she would find Hugh waiting for her outside. Nor was she mistaken; instead of greeting her, however, with the gravity she anticipated, there was a smile on his face, as he extended his hand, saying,

'What a lucky circumstance our having met, Shelah! I have not been in an English church for so long that I was inspired to turn in here as I passed by. I see Bridget is in attendance on you, a most efficient chaperon; I thought at first you were alone when I saw you talking to Captain Thornton.'

'I never go out without Bridget.' A deep blush, which she in vain tried to keep down, rose to Shelah's cheek, as she continued, timidly, 'We met Captain Thornton in the Park, and he insisted on accompanying us!'

'Which shows his good taste,' replied Hugh.

He had also taken counsel with himself, and though burning with indignation against Captain Thornton, and burdened with sorrow and disappointment on his own account, he had decided not to embarrass Shelah by any questions respecting the parting he had witnessed between her and the man he believed she must unconsciously care for, and who was behaving most dishonourably. From him he intended to demand instant and explicit explanation; not another moment should he be allowed to trifle with her affections or compromise her further.

'You look tired, Shelah,' he said, when they had gone a few steps. 'Take my arm, and we can return together to Grosvenor Place.' She looked up at him with deprecating affection as she accepted his offered support, and he continued: 'It is a good strong arm, that has often upheld you before, and is ready to support you in every difficulty, in every action of your life, until the close of time.'

'Do you think I am not sure of this?' she replied, timidly.

In the solitude of her own room Shelah had thought it would be such an easy matter to place herself on that new footing of dignified womanhood she wished to assume in her relations with Hugh; but now that she stood face

to face with the man whose wife she aspired to be, whom she loved with the sweetest, purest love a virgin heart could give, she felt more awkward and constrained in his presence than she had ever felt in her life. He attributed her nervousness and blushes to quite other causes, and, in answer to her timid remark, replied,

'I am glad to hear you say this, dear Shelah, for it gives me the assurance that, if you withhold your confidence from me this morning, it is not from want of trust in me.'

'How right you are! My meeting Captain Thornton this morning was purely accidental; but I can tell you no more respecting what must appear strange to you, for he has begged me to keep secret for the present what he has told me. And I suppose, though only a woman, Hugh, I am bound in honour to keep a secret confided to me?' She looked at him inquiringly.

'The scoundrel!' inwardly exclaimed Hugh, though he answered, quietly, 'I consider the code of honour is as binding on women as on men, dear Shelah.' He smiled on her upturned face. 'All I ask is if you are in any trouble or difficulty you will apply to me before all others for counsel. But here we are arrived at our destination, and I hope we shall find breakfast ready, for I am desperately hungry.'

CHAPTER XVII.

As Shelah divested herself of her hat, and smoothed her hair with greater care and interest than she usually accorded her appearance, she reflected that she would have been better pleased had Hugh expressed disapproval, even displeasure, of what might very properly have incurred his censure. To have treated her meeting with Captain Thornton so leniently and lightly, argued an indifference by no means gratifying.

'Can it be possible he thinks I care for him?' she asked herself, with a rather disconsolate smile, as she descended the stairs to breakfast.

During her absence, Hugh had also been reflecting over the occurrences of the morning, and found them extremely unpalatable. His love for Shelah, though part of his existence, was wholly unselfish, and had he believed Captain Thornton, whose worldly prospects were all that could be desired, worthy of her, he would

have resigned every hope of his own, and, in fear of causing her the slightest sorrow, would never have allowed her to know at what a sacrifice of his own happiness he had made this surrender. But he was equally determined, unless his doubts of Captain Thornton's worthiness to win such a prize were set at rest, to withhold his consent to her marrying him, even though he might be forced by so doing to inflict suffering on her he loved. He had all but decided the previous day to leave the army, and was still doubtful on this point. He had quickly discerned that, notwithstanding Shelah was virtually living under her step-mother's protection, practically she was wholly without guide or counsellor in whom she could place reliance. He had vowed, long years past, to be both to her, and certainly at the present moment she seemed to need the counsel of some truer friend than he believed her to have in her step-mother. If he left the army he had, in the management of his large estates, plenty of occupation. Possibly his more positive duty lay in this direction. In any case, he was not called upon to make a hasty resolution one way or the other. His regiment was sure to remain in the British Isles for many years to come, unless a fresh war broke out, —a most unlikely chance,—and thus he would

find himself within call at any moment that Shelah might require his services. None of these meditations, however, tended to cheerfulness. His appointment with Lord Lillburne, enveloped in mystery as it was, and to which he had reverted again as they parted, hung over him most disagreeably. He had a foreboding that it concerned Shelah and Captain Thornton, that upon it her fate and his own depended. Oh! why could he not carry her away from the network of evil that seemed to be enclosing her? —remove her at once from surroundings evidently so uncongenial to her in every way? Surely it would have been easy to turn her affection for him into a deeper and more desirable channel? He paced the room in a perturbed and agitated spirit as he put these questions to himself, and the answer came with desolating clearness, 'You can do nothing, because she loves another.' But, as Shelah at this moment entered the room, Hugh became at once the man of reason, calm and self-contained, and coming towards her, said, lightly,

'You have been quicker than most young ladies over your personal adornment, Shelah, though I believe this arises from superlative vanity. Nature has endowed you so largely that you think time so spent is unnecessary.'

'Oh, Hugh, you are laughing at me, for you could not descend to flattery. And I must be truthful, I have taken longer than usual over my personal appearance, for the wind had blown my hair in every direction, and I was not fit to be seen.'

'The zephyrs love to handle it, and I don't wonder, Shelah. What beautiful hair you have! I must take a liberty as well as these forward zephyrs,' he said, half-smiling, and passing his hand tenderly over the silky masses of the girl's fair hair.

She coloured deeply, half-pleased, half-vexed. The caress of his loved hand gave her supreme pleasure, but was not such affectionate familiarity the strongest proof that he still only considered her but a child? Moving away rather abruptly, she sat down before the tea-urn.

'Have I vexed you, Shelah? It is so difficult to drop old habits all at once, and to remember you are a woman,' said Hugh, penitently. 'I almost wish you were a child again.'

This was a disastrous speech, and, hardly knowing what she was saying, Shelah replied, with an impetuosity very unlike her,

'I am sure I have plenty to remind me of the important fact that I am a woman, and, as yet, the conviction has not carried supreme felicity

with it. I had many troubles when I was a child, and now that I am a woman,' she stopped suddenly. After all, what was her greatest trouble now that she was a woman? that she could not impress the fact of her womanhood on Hugh—make him understand that the love she had given him as a child was paramount, but had changed in character.

'And now that you are a woman you have troubles of another kind? Is that what you are going to say? But I used to help you out of your childish worries, can I be of no avail now, Shelah?'

She was pouring out the tea, and, without looking up, said, in a low tone,

'I think not. I fear not.'

He gave such a deep sigh in response to this discouraging reply that she glanced up as she handed him the tea-cup, saying,

'You must not think it is from want of confidence I say this, Hugh, dear Hugh. But sometimes it is better to fight out one's troubles alone and unaided. Don't you think so?'

'Certainly. But we must be sure it is in our own power to do this.'

The sentiments Hugh at this moment entertained for Dick Thornton, whom he believed to be the author of Shelah's existing trouble, were any-

thing but Christian, but she had made it so clear that in this matter she did not intend to confide in him that he changed the subject of conversation, saying,

'Where is Lady Ballina? It seems so natural to be with you alone that I had forgotten her existence.'

'That is not very flattering to her, though it is to me. She rarely appears until midday, and we shall have the whole morning to ourselves, I am glad to say, for I have so many things to talk to you about. You only came yesterday, and yet it seems like weeks since your return.'

'Is that meant as a compliment?'

'Take it as you like, sir?' she replied, gaily; then more seriously, 'Hugh, when we are feeling life intensely, joy almost too keenly, after a long period of sorrow and stagnation, do you not agree with me that hours of such intense life crowded with so many joyful emotions may appear much longer than they truly are?'

'Ah,' thought Hugh, wholly misunderstanding this remark, 'she has evidently come to some explicit explanation with that young scoundrel this morning, and is radiantly happy, and mine is the fate, perhaps, to destroy this happiness for ever,' and he replied,

'I hardly agree with you, Shelah. In my opinion, happy hours always appear short and evanescent, as they are few and far between. But, in any case, I intend to make the most of the happiness this morning brings me of being alone with you.'

'You are happy then, Hugh?' she said, timidly. 'I was afraid you were not so last night. At least, Lady Ballina hinted that this was the case.' She looked at him fixedly, would he allude to Lady Lillburne?—tell her something about his former engagement? or would the subject be too painful for him to approach?

Evidently, whether this was the case or not, he had no intention of talking about it. For with an air of annoyance he exclaimed,

'What on earth could your step-mother mean, Shelah? I wish she would mind her own affairs. Do you place implicit credence on all her statements? I should not have thought so.'

'Oh, no,' she replied, hastily. But at the same time Shelah reflected, with that power of self-tormenting we all possess in critical moments of life, 'He has not, however, contradicted her statement.'

After a little pause she continued,

'Is it not something like old days at Malta, when my dear father was away, you and I

being at breakfast, alone, like this, Hugh? So like and yet so unlike. It always seems to me that destiny shapes our lives so entirely contrary to what we anticipate or desire.'

'Ah, Shelah. If we were not assured it is no blind chance, but an overruling and wise Power that shapes our destiny for us, the disappointments we encounter at every turn of our onward progress would be insupportable.'

He gazed at her earnestly as he spoke. She looked so lovely, so homelike in the eminently feminine occupation in which she was engaged, and so exactly as he had often pictured her sitting at the head of his own breakfast-table, that to feel he had been supplanted by another whose love was, he had been led to believe, but the ephemeral fancy of fickle boyhood, was irrepressibly bitter. But they had now finished breakfast, for, though both had declared their hunger was abnormal, neither had testified to the truth of this assertion; and, on Shelah proposing their adjournment to the music-room, Hugh gladly assented.

'By-and-by I am going to display my musical genius for you. But first you must sit down in this comfortable arm-chair, and listen to the all-wise sayings I am about to propound for your edification.'

She drew a low settee close to the chair she had pointed out for him, and, sitting down, leant her arm on it. Unconsciously she was falling into her old familiar manner with Hugh.

'You don't wish to smoke, do you? If you do, we must go on the balcony, or—' she looked round with acted terror—'we shall get into disgrace.'

'I have no wish to smoke, Shelah, but to make the most of fleeting time, for at twelve I have an appointment with Lord Lillburne.' He did not intend to let her know of his alarming attack at the club the previous evening.

'In that case, I must get as many words into as short a space as possible, and you must promise beforehand to agree with everything I say and propose.'

'Blindly, Shelah?' he asked, with a smile.

'Blindly,'—very sternly frowning up at him.

'I fear this is impossible.'

'When I asked you to do anything for me in past days, you never said it was impossible,' she said, reproachfully.

'You were a child then. Everything is changed.' There was impatience and irritation in the tone of his voice. 'And even then I refused your childish requests, Shelah, if I deemed their fulfilment likely to injure you.

What is it you wish? Tell me, without making conditions, and be certain I will refuse nothing that tends to your welfare.'

'I am satisfied,' she replied, joyously; but for a moment she seemed to hesitate over her communication, then, glancing quickly up, said, 'Your control over me is complete, is it not? You can do exactly as you like with me until I am of age.'

'Do exactly as I like with you? I wish to heaven I could!' he exclaimed, with sudden passion. 'But have you not yourself put this out of my power?' he laughed rather bitterly.

'What do you mean, Hugh?' she asked, in a bewildered way. 'How have I put it out of your power? What I want you to do is simply to give your consent to my——'

He interrupted her quickly, and said impetuously, almost sternly, as he rose abruptly from his chair,

'Do not make this request, whatever it may be. Let this matter rest for a few days, I implore you, Shelah, for I may be obliged to refuse.' He moved to the window; he dreaded seeing what her face might express.

'Refuse! why should you, and why should I wait? Lady Ballina has evidently been saying something to you on this subject. But it is one

in which no one, not even you, Hugh, have just right to exercise control. Why should I go out in London, if the very idea is distasteful to me? Can you not understand that to do so under Lady Ballina's chaperonage would be continued martyrdom to me? I have waited until your return to tell you this. I wish to leave London, to return and live at Ballina, until—until—' she stopped; she was about to say, 'until I can live with you,' but checked herself. Once before she had made this proposition, and it had been but faintly responded to.

Colonel Carmichael was so completely taken aback by a communication so totally different from what he anticipated, that for an instant he was unable to reply; then, coming close to her, he said, sharply,

'Or until you are married? Is that what you mean, Shelah?'

'I did not say this,' she replied, faintly, and yet in the deep recesses of her heart she knew this was exactly what she did mean, but not married to the man Hugh supposed her to be thinking of. As he stood close to her, watching with silent, jealous emotion her changing colour, downcast eyes, she continued, in a low voice, 'I know I ought not to hamper your life in any way. You have done enough for me and mine.

It was selfish of me to propose, as I did yesterday, your leaving the army. I wish it no longer.'

'That is very considerate on your part, Shelah,' he replied, ironically; 'but circumstances may force me to do so.' A throb of such satisfaction lit up the girl's face at this announcement as might have accorded Hugh considerable and pleasurable information had he not been wholly possessed with one idea. He continued, more gently, 'But in any case I do not see my way to fall in with your proposition. You cannot take up your residence alone at Ballina, and your step-mother has informed me over and over again in her letters that nothing will ever induce her to return to Ireland.'

'I am aware of this. She has the greatest dread of the legend attached to our family, and fears the Banshee might forecast her own death. This is her chief reason for never wishing to return to Ballina.'

'And have you no fear on this subject? Are you so brave of spirit as to be indifferent to this legend in which you once had such strong belief, and not without cause, my poor Shelah?'

'Yes!' she replied, simply; but there was deep sadness in her voice, as she continued, 'I am indifferent, because she can cause me no further sorrow. And, if it had not been for her warning

cry, I should never have arrived in time to see my dear father alive. She can only predict my own death now, Hugh.'

'God forbid she should do that,' he exclaimed, quickly, letting his hand drop on her shoulder. 'You allude to death as though life had no attractions for you.'

'It has plenty of attractions for me,' she replied, smiling, and not this time withdrawing from his protective caress. 'But not in London. Oh, Hugh!' she exclaimed, suddenly, taking hold of his hand, 'I want rest and peace, I am rather weary in spirit. If you knew—no, even you cannot know—how I have suffered both before and since my father's death. There is no rest and peace to be found in this great town. I long for the country—for Ballina. They think I have forgotten everything. Lady Ballina thinks I have forgotten her cruel conduct to me, and I never can. You must see for yourself how impossible it is for me to go on living with her.'

Here Shelah covered her face with her hand and burst into tears. Greatly disturbed, moved beyond power of expression, in fear of betraying his own feelings, and certain that Shelah's emotion had other and deeper sources than she either chose to or could acknowledge, Hugh

took his hand from her shoulder and sat down again near her, saying tenderly,

'It distracts me to see you crying, dearest Shelah. Everything that I can do to make your life happier, you may depend upon my doing. You kept me in too great ignorance of all that has occurred since your father's death. Even now I do not believe I have your entire confidence, and this renders it much more difficult for me to know how to act best for your welfare; your returning to Ballina at present is impossible. The property pays very little more than the mortgages upon it, and Lady Ballina, who is our mortgagee, fearing things may become worse, threatens to foreclose.'

'Ah! and then Ballina would have to be sold,' she exclaimed, looking up through her tears; 'this would completely break my heart, Hugh.'

'Have no fear, dear Shelah, your heart will never be broken by the sale of Ballina. I know of another mortgagee perfectly prepared to take Lady Ballina's place, and who has better hopes of poor Ireland's future than she has. He will nurse your property with care until you come of age.'

'And that mortgagee is yourself, Hugh. I feel it—I know it!' she exclaimed, impulsively. 'How can I be grateful enough to you?'

'You are like an April day, Shelah, all showers and gleams of sunshine. If I wished for a reward, that joyous smile on your face would be more than sufficient. But indeed I deserve none, for I consider my money would be safe, and I intend to run over to Ireland in a few days to look after my own interests and yours.'

'If you knew how happy you have made me, Hugh. Lady Ballina's constant reference to the sale of my loved home has weighed upon me so heavily. How I should like to go over to Ireland with you. But I suppose this is impossible,' she added, timidly.

'Quite,' he answered, briefly. The very idea of her thinking it possible annoyed him excessively, but, observing the rising cloud gathering on her face at his curt refusal, he said, half smiling, 'You see, Shelah, you have yourself reminded me you are now a woman, and please to recollect I am not quite the elderly gentleman to others I evidently appear to you. There is nothing in my refusal to vex you. Are you really so desirous as you imagine to accompany me to Ireland?'

'Just as you like; I wish to act in every way as you decide,' she replied, demurely. She must not display too great an anxiety to be with him; she had made an advance. He was

not treating her like a child in refusing her companionship on this journey, undertaken solely in her interest. And oh, how grateful she felt to him, how she loved him ten thousand times more than she had ever done!

'Your obedience is so exemplary, Shelah, that it merits recompense. We can leave the subject of your coming out in London in abeyance. You may think very differently on this point next year. In the meanwhile, I have a proposition to make as regards the next few months, which I hope and think may meet with your approval. When I leave for Ireland, would you like to go with Bridget to my place in Cornwall. Of course Lady Ballina would join you on my return there. You love the sea, and my place is in full view of the Atlantic. The scenery of the coast is wild and grand, just what you would like. Later on, I intend to ask the Lillburnes there, and Captain Thornton also,—that is, if this meets with your wishes.' He looked keenly into her face. 'You hesitate; my plan does not suit you then?'

Shelah was considering. She did not the least wish for Lady Lillburne's society, and would willingly have dispensed with Captain Thornton's. But perhaps none of them would accept; so she replied, joyously,

'Hesitate! If I were asked to fly to heaven, would I refuse, Hugh? Your plan is so delightful that it took my breath away. As to Captain Thornton,' she coloured perceptibly, 'I hardly think he will be able to accept, and Lady Lillburne hates the country, and will most likely refuse your invitation,' she added, a little spitefully. 'But none of these things matter to me. I am going to leave London; going to your house; going to be your housekeeper, and get everything ready for your arrival, Hugh. You are a fairy god-father to me. I could dance with delight.' She sprang up from her seat with the glee of a child, clapping her hands together. Then, turning swiftly round, made him a little curtsey, saying, 'What amount of groceries shall I order in, sir?'

'She is perfectly incomprehensible,' thought Colonel Carmichael. 'But so are all women.' Out loud, he observed, gravely, 'As I engage you as my housekeeper, I leave all these matters to your discretion. I only trust you will be economical and have my interests at heart. If not—' he shook his finger—'instant dismissal. And, now that we have settled weightier affairs, will you sing for me, my lady-help? Allow me to lead you to the piano.'

He took her hand, put it to his lips, and to-

gether they moved to the music-room. Suddenly she stopped, looked him straight in the face, and said, quickly,

'Hugh, do you think you will ever marry?'

He started, changed colour, and replied gravely,

'I do not think I ever shall, Shelah.'

'Ah! then I can remain your housekeeper until the end of time.'

'Or until you marry yourself.'

She laughed merrily as she replied,

'Precisely, until I marry myself, and your interests are no longer my paramount concern.'

She opened the piano quickly, and, sitting down, sang him song after song with all the thrilling pathos that a heart swelling with true love and gratitude can alone impart, and Hugh listened entranced, drinking in every moment deeper draughts of what he deemed a hopeless passion.

CHAPTER XVIII.

When Hugh had conveyed Lord Lillburne home, in a hastily procured cab, after his disastrous meeting with him at the club, not a word had he uttered in explanation of his illness. He merely observed he had gone there in hopes of catching Captain Thornton before he went to the ball, as he wished particularly to say a few words to him; and having again enjoined Hugh to reveal to no one either his illness or his having been at the club that night, and reminding him of his promise to call the following day, he bid his 'good Samaritan,' as he termed Hugh, good-night, and disappeared within his own doors.

Slowly and painfully he dragged himself upstairs to his dressing-room. His heart was beating with ominously quick pulsations. His brain felt confused, and he frequently passed his hand over his burning brow as though to clear his thoughts. But his mental disquietude was so much in the ascendant that he was careless

of bodily suffering, and sought no remedy for its alleviation. As he passed his wife's bedroom he remained for some minutes standing outside; once he touched the handle of the door, and as quickly drew back, muttering, as he wiped the drops of perspiration from his set, white face.

'No, I cannot trust myself. I will see her in the morning. Reflection will give me time for prudent and calmer action.'

Turning abruptly away, he entered his own room, locked himself in, and, sitting down near his writing-table, leaned his throbbing head on his hands. In this despondent and grief-stricken attitude he remained for a considerable time, motionless as a figure of stone. He was endeavouring to collect his thoughts, to pick out some crumbs of hope or consolation from the conversation it had been his unlucky fate to overhear. That Mabel had been guilty of the most culpable indiscretion, causing scandal once again to attach to the name of Lillburne—that she had betrayed the trust he had forced himself to accord her—he did not for one moment doubt; but that she had fallen into deeper sin—sin that would cover him with dishonour, he never for a moment credited. This confidence arose from no strong belief in her strength to resist

temptation, but from his faith in Thornton's rectitude and honour.

The young man he had so imprudently—yes, imprudently, for his was the blame—thrown in such close domesticity with his lovely wife, might have been led into a passing flirtation with a woman whose thirst for admiration so far exceeded her self-respect. But here, he could have sworn, Dick's culpability ended. If even he had erred so far as this, he had evidently been struck by a foreboding of danger, and drawn back. The very men whose accursed tongues had dared to traduce him and his wife allowed this! And was it not self-evident that he loved Shelah, and Shelah only, sought her society on every occasion, and had aroused thereby Mabel's anger and jealousy? Moreover, had he not, for some time, almost discontinued his visits to their house, thus giving full proof that his passing admiration for another man's wife had been checked in the bud by a nobler, more legitimate affection—an affection he was certain was returned, and must end in a happy union.

It was his own lack of foresight that had led to disastrous results he had never foreseen or dreamed of. He had behaved like a madman, and, forgetting the weakness of the woman's

character he had to deal with, had thrust temptation upon her, placed her in the way of danger. Perhaps, oh! misery, she really cared for gay, handsome Thornton. He had himself never won her affection, though he had tried so hard lately —none knew how hard; and now he would be forced to act in a way that would, most probably, close her heart for ever against him. But he must bear the punishment of his own folly. Even for Mabel's sake, he could no longer allow her such uncontrolled liberty; the merciless tongue of slander, ever ready to magnify evil, must be silenced. For the remainder of the season, whenever she appeared in society, he would be seen by the side of the woman he had sworn to love, honour, and cherish. He must shield her from the malicious tongue of slander. The world should be made to see—ay, and acknowledge—that he was not to be classed among those husbands who are ready to condone a wife's laxity and their own shame. These men had said he loved his wife no longer; that this accounted for his blindness and carelessness to that which was patent to everyone else!

'Oh, heavens!' he suddenly exclaimed, starting out of his immobility and throwing his clenched hands upwards, 'love her no longer? Weak and frail of spirit as she has proved, she

is all I have to love. It is my love that has caused both my blindness and apparent indifference. By confidence and trust I hoped I was beginning to gain her love, and I have failed. Mabel, Mabel! is there no way of winning your affection?'

Could his wife have seen him at this supreme moment, and witnessed how his love was battling with his justly-awakened suspicions, her eyes might have been opened to the fatal consequences of her levity and deception. During the ordeal he was passing through, and increasing its bitterness, was mingled the recollection of the never-forgotten dishonour already clinging to his house, and this remembrance added a fierce sting to his miserable meditations. But emotions of so stern a character as were torturing this unhappy husband resemble in their nature the sudden hurricane sweeping over the heated desert, which, from its very violence, exhausts itself as rapidly. Were it otherwise, such a mental storm as had laid Lord Lillburne low would overbalance the reason of frail humanity. Fortunately, such paroxysms must end in physical prostration, and, after a few moments, he raised his head and gazed wildly around, pressing his hand painfully over his brow; then suddenly he rose, and, seizing a candle from the table, he

approached the heavy, carved oak mantel-piece. Above it, framed also in oak, hung a veiled picture. With an impetuous movement of his disengaged hand he tore the veil aside, and left exposed to view the representation of a story centuries old, but still retaining power, from its unsurpassed pathos, to move all hearts until the end of time. This picture was not, as might have been supposed, the cherished resemblance of one loved and lost, but of that erring woman of old who, veiling her face in abject self-abasement, crouches conscience-stricken at the feet of an all-pure Saviour as she hears His divine lips pronouncing the assurance of a mercy and pardon pharisaical men have denied her.

Long and earnestly, with painful intentness, the son who had proved so harsh and inexorable a judge of a mother's frailty gazed up at this picture. He had purchased it soon after the late unhappy Lady Lillburne's death, and always kept it near him. He had a morbid idea that if revealed, if her hands were removed from the face of this penitent Magdalen's, it would prove to be that of the mother he had so loved, and yet whose life had been shortened by his coldness and harshness. A death-like stillness reigned throughout the house. Everybody had retired to rest except the owner. His heavy breathing,

and the ticking of the clock alone disturbed the silence of the room. For many minutes Lord Lillburne remained in absorbed contemplation of the picture, then, placing the candle down, he sank on his knees and, clasping his hands together convulsively, the quiet of the night was invaded by the sound of his deep voice as it arose in solemn utterance, saying,

'She will never, never turn her eyes in this world upon her harsh, undutiful son. Mother—poor, unhappy mother—you are at rest now, washed and cleansed from all earth's defilements. But my harshness, my undutiful conduct, embittered your last moments. Help me now to err—if it is error—on the side of mercy.' Then, as though repelling some darker thought, he almost shrieked out, 'But there is no call for mercy. Mabel, you may have no love to give me, but you would not be so cruel as to blast my life a second time. My God, help me, guide me in this my sore trouble.'

And thus Lord Lillburne passed the night, in groanings that cannot be uttered—in wild, ejaculatory prayer. Towards morning, dragging himself towards his bed, he sank down completely exhausted, and fell into heavy slumber for some hours. Unnatural as it may appear that a man of such fiery and uncontrolled pas-

sions as Lord Lillburne had so often proved himself should act so diametrically in opposition to what might have been anticipated when a real cause had arisen calculated to rekindle those flames of jealousy and mistrust of his wife, which, though kept under subjugation, were never wholly extinguished, his conduct can only be accounted for by the strong religious element that had for some time influenced his life, helping him to keep under control that violent temper to which he had formerly given way without restraint. Religion had become a powerful factor in Lord Lillburne's daily life, and it was this all-powerful agent that had sustained him through his long night of agony. He no longer viewed his wife's conduct simply as it affected his own happiness and honour, but as it involved her eternal welfare. Mabel must be saved from the consequences of wrong-doing not only in this world, but in the next.

To Shelah's gentle guidance may be attributed to a great extent the religious turn Lord Lillburne's mind had taken. In the two winters he had spent seeing her almost daily, her simple faith, her submission to sorrow, her unvarying respect to Lady Ballina, and patience under her petty tyrannies, her love for her father's memory, and her unswerving rectitude, had made a pro-

found impression on him. It was she who had coaxed him into going to church—a habit he had long given up. In her simple way she had discussed serious subjects of belief with this strange man so many years older than herself, and had reaped the fruits of her unpretentious, yet earnest missionary work. Such is the power one pure spirit can gain over that of one whose faith has hitherto been weak and wavering.

When Lord and Lady Lillburne met at a late breakfast, the emotions influencing both were controlled by the conventional conversation the presence of the servants necessitated. Mabel would willingly have prolonged their attendance, for she was in a state of nervous depression, and not only wholly disinclined, but unable to make any exertion towards agreeability. But after Lord Lillburne had persistently refused to partake of any of the numerous dishes offered him, and the servants had noiselessly left the room, she made an effort to open conversation, saying,

'You came home very late last night, Lillburne. It is your province to amuse me this morning. For, seeing I went nowhere, I have no light and airy topic of conversation wherewith to entertain you. Did you take a long walk?'

To meet his wife at breakfast was an event

always looked forward to by Lord Lillburne with pleasure. It was his one safe opportunity of seeing her alone, and on these occasions she was usually full of spirits and life, revelling in the recollection of her social triumphs the preceding evening, and therefore quite ready to be pleasant and lively. He held the newspaper in his hand as she spoke, and, without laying it aside, answered,

'I did not take a walk, I went to the—club, hoping to catch Thornton there, but I was disappointed.'

'You went to the club! what an unusual thing for you to do! Did you hear any news? Gossip and scandal, generally speaking, has its source there, whatever you men may aver to the contrary.'

The newspaper shook in her husband's hand as he replied, in a low voice,

'I heard no news you would care to hear.' He paused for an instant—should he tell her, warn her?—then he added, quickly, 'Unless it might interest you to know that I am considered a careless, negligent husband, who no longer loves his wife.' He dropped the newspaper and faced her. He was ghastly pale, and dark lines encircled his eyes, making them appear doubly fierce, while his lips twitched nervously as he

rose, and, coming round to her chair, placed his hand on her shoulder. She wore a thin muslin gown, and his touch seemed positively to scorch her.

'Good heavens, Lillburne, how hot your hand is! It positively burns,' she exclaimed, with sudden apprehension of approaching evil. 'But what do you mean? You are enigmatical. You alarm me.'

'I have no wish to do so. But, tell me, do you believe me to be the careless, negligent husband I am accused of being?'

'No, no,' she exclaimed. 'You have been too kind to me lately.'

'Too kind, Mabel! I could not be that; and then consider I have arrears of kindness to make up. Notwithstanding I have been thoughtless and selfish, even in my kindness, my traducers are right. I have been negligent of a husband's duties. I have consulted my own tastes over-much. A husband should always be seen by his wife's side in public, Mabel, and henceforth, forsaking my recluse habits, it is my intention to accompany you to those gay scenes in which you find such pleasure, trusting that in time you will weary of wasting fleeting and precious hours in these vain amusements.'

Lady Lillburne was completely taken aback by the expression of an intention on her husband's part, which, if carried into effect, would deprive her of all further excuse for complaining of his coldness and neglect. And this, alas! she was in the constant habit of doing; but she was very frightened also at a determination so suddenly expressed without any reason being assigned. And, rising from the table, replied, in tones she vainly strove to steady,

'I am at a loss to understand what gossip you have heard, but it is not like you to treat club gossip seriously, Lillburne, and I should be very sorry that you should make any change in your mode of life likely to be disagreeable to you.'

'Or that would be disagreeable to you? Is that your meaning?' he asked, sternly. 'Is it nothing to you that my conduct should meet with misrepresentation?—that hard and lying words should be levelled against one whose only wish is to make you happy? Even at some cost to myself I am determined to put an end to such accusations, Mabel.'

'And do you imagine that being always seen by my side will effect this? The world will only say that you are jealous of me, and that you are watching my behaviour, as you were in

the habit of doing,' she said, in tones of attempted raillery, moving towards the door, and opening it.

'The world may think and say what it likes,' he replied, gloomily. 'I will take my chance of this unpleasant verdict on my conduct. Hitherto you have have had Thornton to fulfil all those small offices that ladies find so necessary when they are in society, of calling your carriage and finding your cloak. He is my friend, I could trust him to take care of my wife; but in future I shall consider these my exclusive privileges, and my duty.' As her husband thus spoke, the colour fled from Lady Lillburne's face, and, overcome with a fear she was making superhuman efforts to conceal, she leaned against the door for support. Without appearing to notice her agitation, he continued, 'For when Dick is engaged to Shelah, as I feel certain will shortly be the case, you will lose your cavalier; she will never care much for gaiety, and naturally he will retire from pleasures in which she takes no part.'

'You are quite decided in your own mind, then, that Shelah returns the affection you believe him to entertain for her?' faintly replied Lady Lillburne.

'Yes, Mabel, I am certain on this point. This

very morning I am to discuss the subject with Colonel Carmichael. Surely you can have no other desire but that this marriage, I have so much at heart, should take place? You would not, I trust, do anything to hinder it? Colonel Carmichael will be shown into my morning-room—and here he is. I fear you are not well, Mabel. Had you not better go and lie down?—perhaps you resent the intention I have expressed. Yet, believe me, I am actuated in everything I intend to do in the future by the truest desire for your happiness.'

She made no reply, and he left the room.

CHAPTER XIX.

As Lord Lillburne entered the library where his visitor awaited him, Hugh was painfully struck by his haggard, care-worn appearance. Mabel had been too disturbed by her own personal emotions to notice what was so apparent, not only to Hugh, but to every servant in the house.

'The discipline of a soldier's life has taught you to be exact to your appointments. You are even before your time, Colonel Carmichael,' observed Lord Lillburne, holding out his hand.

'I was anxious to know how you were; but from your looks I fear you are still suffering, and how your hand burns!'

'I am free from all physical ailments this morning, I can assure you. My head is slightly confused, but this is sometimes the case with me lately, and accounts for my attacks. However, it is but a temporary inconvenience, and soon passes off; but pray sit down, I have a subject of vital importance to discuss with you. And

without beating about the bush I will enter upon it at once.'

Colonel Carmichael bowed. He had no wish to retard the progress of a communication he was most anxious to hear, and Lord Lillburne continued, with nervous haste,

'You have not mentioned seeing me at the club last night or my illness to anyone, have you?'

'I promised I would not; and I have not.'

'Of course, of course. You are a man of honour. You are to be trusted. And I will prove my further confidence in your discretion by telling you what upset me last night, Colonel Carmichael. I heard my wife's name,' a spasm of pain contracted the speaker's face, 'coupled with that of Captain Thornton's in a way that was most distressing to me. Of course I am aware there is no shadow of reason for the gossip I accidentally overheard at the club.' Lord Lillburne waived his hand in the air, as though casting to the winds every doubt on this subject. 'Both are above suspicion. But at the same time it is of course imperative such talk should be at once and for ever silenced, "for ever."' Here Lord Lillburne seemed to lose the thread of his subject, for he began to walk up and down the room in violent agitation, and,

apparently forgetful of Colonel Carmichael's presence, muttered to himself several times, 'for ever, for ever.'

Full of compassion for this tempest-torn man, who had evidently, for the first time, become acquainted with the rumours that had been circulating so long about his wife, Hugh said gently,

'You are wise in attaching no importance to the words of idle tongues, Lord Lillburne.'

'Have I not told you I treat them with indifference and contempt,' he fiercely responded, ceasing his restless walk and facing Hugh. 'But Mabel is inconsiderate, fond of admiration, much run after, and exposed in consequence to unusual temptations; from these it is a husband's part to shield her. She is very lovely, very fascinating, as you know, Carmichael, for you loved her once yourself,' he added, pathetically. 'I never knew this until after we were married. I found it out accidentally. She had left an open letter written to you on her table, containing an appeal for the continuance of your friendship, and complaining of my violence and harshness, the impossibility of her ever caring for me. Ah! it would have been happier for poor Mabel had she been true to you, Carmichael. It was a bitter letter for a husband's eye to fall upon, and it maddened me. I mistook the part

I should have enacted under such circumstances, and I was very hard and cruel. I frightened and repelled her still further by my harshness.'

'But all this is changed now, Lord Lillburne. Shelah is ever singing your praises as the kindest, most considerate of husbands!'

'Does the enchantress praise the results of her own work?' Lord Lillburne smiled drearily. 'Whatever change there is in me,—and I am changed, Carmichael,—is her doing. And mine will be, I trust, the grateful task to reward Shelah for what she has done for me. I hold the key of her future happiness in my own hands, of this I have long been certain.'

'Hold the key of Shelah's happiness in your hands? This requires explanation, Lord Lillburne.'

Hugh spoke with slight haughtiness.

'Explanation is not difficult. Thornton is heir to both my title and estates. The property is strictly entailed. He is a great match, suitable in every way for Shelah, and I am ready to make any settlements you demand—he loves Shelah—she loves him!'

Lord Lillburne looked with an air of triumph at Hugh. He considered his arguments unanswerable.

'Who says Shelah loves Captain Thornton,

or that he loves her, Lord Lillburne? Only last night Lady Lillburne informed me that he was amusing himself at her expense, and had no serious intentions. And, if such is the case, you must yourself see that the intimacy between them should at once be ended.'

'It is false,' exclaimed Lord Lillburne. 'I have spoken to him on this matter, and he has never denied his love for Shelah. To declare it, he was, I am convinced, simply waiting for your return, as of course he was perfectly right in doing. You are here now, and surely you will place no obstacle in the way of these young people's happiness.'

'Shelah's happiness is the first consideration I have in this world. I am not likely to do anything that will mar it,' responded Hugh, bitterly. 'But, before I accede to your proposal of marriage for her, I must be certain it is for her happiness, and that Captain Thornton is worthy of my ward.'

'What reason have you for doubting that one I know so intimately is not worthy of her? Has she said anything against him? Do you think she does not care for him? You are mistaken—quite mistaken;' he spoke irritably.

'Lord Lillburne, Shelah has not breathed a word to me on this subject. And, to tell the

truth, I fear there is some understanding between her and Captain Thornton, for I met them together this morning, returning from the Park, and they were engaged in earnest and evidently confidential conversation. I strongly blame Captain Thornton for running the risk of compromising so young a girl as Shelah by an act of such great indiscretion, for I gathered from her that this was no accidental meeting on his side, though it was on hers.'

'Come, come, Colonel Carmichael, much must be forgiven and overlooked to a man so desperately in love with so charming a girl.'

'I do not agree with you. Captain Thornton's love, if it is a true one, should make him more circumspect where she he loves is concerned. Moreover, he has vowed her to keep secret what passed between them.'

'And, in the meanwhile, you see I am right. They *do* care for each other,' triumphantly exclaimed Lord Lillburne, wholly untroubled by the condemnation Hugh had passed on Dick Thornton's proceedings. 'Perhaps I have been more precipitate than I should have been in this affair. But do you not see that the immediate announcement of this engagement will at once put an end to all the gossip that has been in circulation, owing to any selfish negligence of my

duty as a husband? No man should allow others to consider that he neglects his wife.'

There was irritation in the tones of the speaker's voice, and yet such intense supplication that Hugh was deeply touched. It was so evident that in Lord Lillburne's mind Shelah was but a secondary consideration, and that his proposal for an immediate engagement between her and Dick Thornton had been hurried on, with a view of protecting his wife's name from further slander. But, notwithstanding the depth of his commiseration for Lord Lillburne's trouble, Shelah's life-long happiness, that was hanging in the scale of eventualities, was his foremost concern, and unless Captain Thornton could prove himself worthy of Shelah, Hugh was determined, at all cost of present sorrow to her, to refuse his consent to the marriage Lord Lillburne proposed. He must, however, act with the profoundest discretion, the greatest calmness and forgetfulness of self, in order to be assured he was in no way influenced by his own love for Shelah. He must, above all, be careful to raise no suspicion of Mabel in her husband's mind beyond what the disastrous occurrence of the previous evening had already sown. Quickly he turned all these momentous considerations over in his mind, and then said,

'This is too grave a matter for hasty conclusion, Lord Lillburne. I naturally consider the man does not exist who is worthy to claim Shelah for his wife. In every case she is far too young to take so irrevocable a step as you propose. Will you trust me to act for the best in this matter? I cannot—will not, precipitate an event where her whole future happiness is at stake, and I must ask you not to revert to this subject for at least a few months, nor to mention it to Captain Thornton. If he and Shelah are attached to each other, a little waiting will only increase their love. For reasons I am unable to fathom, Shelah wishes to leave London at once. In consequence I have arranged for her to spend the autumn months at my place in Cornwall.'

'By herself with you?' exclaimed Lord Lillburne.

'That would not be possible,' replied Hugh, the colour perceptibly suffusing his bronzed face. 'I am in rather a peculiar position as regards Shelah. I am her sole guardian, and, while feeling the weight of my responsibilities, am not sufficiently venerable to claim the privileges this position would otherwise give. Lady Ballina will join Shelah at the close of the season. I am going to Ireland in a few days. On my

return later on I have hopes of inducing you and Lady Lillburne to pay me a visit. I can give you some shooting; yachting also, if you care for it. And, as it is my duty to become better acquainted with Captain Thornton, I shall invite him also to join us. I trust this meets with your wishes, and will suit you.'

'I suppose it must. I am much disappointed Shelah's engagement cannot be announced at once. But you evidently do not intend to place any hindrance in the way of its ultimately taking place. And for this I warmly thank you, also for your kind invitation, which I gladly accept. I am very weary of this hateful city, but I must drag on here until the season is ended.'

Lord Lillburne, who had never sat down during the whole of this conversation, now threw himself into a chair, sighing deeply.

'Why are you obliged to remain in London? Surely Lady Lillburne would be willing to leave, if she realises you are ill, as I am sure you are.'

'I shall not ask her. It is imperative I should remain here for awhile. I wish to appear in society with my wife for the rest of the season. Not to watch her, Carmichael, no—no, not so, but to let the world see I care for her, that I love her. You do not dream that I have any other motive, do you?' he asked, feverishly.

'Certainly not,' replied Hugh, soothingly. 'No one can doubt your love for Lady Lillburne, and nothing is more calculated to arrest every word of gossip than to let the world see that this is the case. And I must now really leave you, for I am overwhelmed with business of all sorts. Will you join Shelah and me in the Park this evening?'

'I generally avoid the Park at fashionable hours,' replied Lord Lillburne, slowly. 'But, yes, I will join you there—with Mabel,' he added, with sudden animation. 'I shall drive with her this afternoon. We can get out and walk. Ah, ah! It will give the world something to talk about, when they see us together, like Darby and Joan. Good-bye, Carmichael, and thank you for coming.'

As the door closed upon Hugh, Lord Lillburne murmured as he approached his writing-table, 'Does he suspect her? or discredit Thornton's honesty and truth, that he moves so cautiously in this affair? Or does he love Shelah himself? What more natural? He left her a child, and comes home to find her a most lovely and lovable woman. Why torture myself by seeking for any other solution of the enigma. Poor Carmichael! and he has no chance.'

When once Lord Lillburne had taken an

idea in his head it was impossible to eradicate it. He believed and wished to believe that Shelah returned Dick Thornton's love, and nothing but her own avowal to the contrary would have convinced him he was wrong. Their marriage would silence every ugly rumour. Under the influence of so assuring a reflection, as days past he returned to a serener frame of mind, and, having decided on the line of conduct he intended to pursue, put it into immediate execution. Henceforth Lord and Lady Lillburne were rarely seen apart. He drove with her, sat in the Park by her side, accompanied her whenever she went out at night, and returned home with her. To him this was a purgatorial change of all his studious and retired habits, yet never once did he swerve from his honourable resolution of rehabilitating his wife's name in the eyes of the world; it was owing to his imprudent latitude that a passing breath of scandal had tarnished its brightness. It was his duty to efface every vestige of that scandal.

Lady Lillburne made no resistance to the new order of things. If she resented her comparative loss of liberty, fear kept her silent and submissive. For ever since the night he had come home from the club, followed by their

memorable conversation at breakfast, she lived in tormenting doubts lest her husband had heard something more than he had revealed to her. Such a fatality could alone account for his present extraordinary conduct. At the same time—though ill at ease—she could not complain that he exercised any undue espionage over her movements, where they appeared together in public: for once arrived at the scene of those festivities, where he felt and looked so out of his element, he effaced himself entirely as far as Mabel was concerned, neither interfering in her evening's amusement nor approaching her, if he observed she was occupied in conversation with her numerous admirers. Though as she floated round the ball-room in all her grace and loveliness—a dream of beauty, he would watch her from some shaded corner, with eyes of glowing love and sorrow, sadly questioning whether this butterfly of society, so devoid of all stability and sober reflection, so completely taken up with this world's pleasures, could ever be induced, except by some dire catastrophe, to view life more seriously. Then with this thought uppermost in his mind, when the dance concluded, he would address her a few kindly words, enquiring if his services could be of any use, and though they were rarely accepted, his patience

was untiring, and until she expressed a desire of leaving he remained at his post.

Under the new *régime* of her husband's chaperonage, Lady Lillburne had really ceased to care much about going into society. She felt his surveillance provoked remark; but late hours had become a necessity to her; she also reflected that her pertinacity in going out every night must ultimately weary him of the new office he had undertaken. She had not calculated, indeed she was unaware of the great change that had come over him. Religion to her was but a form, while to him it had become a living truth. He had a soul to save, and that soul was his wife's. The only woman he had ever cared for in his life, for whom he would willingly have sacrificed his own. And on their return home, when Mabel believed him to have retired to rest, he was often engaged in prayer for her eternal welfare, or imploring for a peaceful ending to his domestic sorrows.

Once and once only had Lord Lillburne and Captain Thornton met in society. On this occasion the young man had simply come to the ball, one of the most brilliant of the season, to inform Lady Lillburne of his settled intention of leaving England, and at the same time to bid her good-bye. The opportunity, however, for

doing this was not granted him, for Lady Lillburne, filled with rancour at his long neglect, purposely avoided holding any conversation with him. He would be forced, therefore, to write her that letter of farewell he had come to the ball to avoid doing. Too much weighted with sadness to find any enjoyment in surrounding scenes, he was listlessly leaving the ball-room, when suddenly, on the stairs, he found himself face to face with Lord Lillburne and staggered back as though he had seen a ghost, exclaiming,

'You here, Lord Lillburne?'

All those standing near were on the alert to see how Lord Lillburne would greet Captain Thornton. They must have been disappointed, for, with a smile, Lord Lillburne replied,

'I am in the flesh, I can assure you, Dick. I can well understand, however, your surprise at seeing me in an atmosphere so uncongenial, as you know, to my tastes. But it is never too late to mend. I have seen the error of my ways, and have given up the habits of a recluse until,' he added, wearily, 'Mabel gets tired of this whirl she continues to find so much satisfaction in.'

'It must be a whirl most distasteful to you,' replied Thornton, looking anxiously into the lined, worn face of the speaker.

'Ah, my dear Dick, when you are married you

will find out, as every man does sooner or later, that matrimony entails responsibilities we had perhaps not sufficiently considered beforehand.'

With what appeared, to lookers-on, as ostentatious familiarity, he placed his hand, as he spoke, on the young man's shoulder. They were wrong; Lord Lillburne's movement was one of genuine affection. If Dick had been beguiled into too warm an affection for Mabel in the past, he forgave him. For what was more likely to have happened, considering the dangerous proximity into which his own want of foresight had thrown them? That, with the imprudence of youth, he had allowed the world to become aware of his feelings he could not doubt; but he also felt certain that, if any kind friend had warned him of the evil words spoken, he would have fled at once from a presence that had become too dear to him, and so ended for ever any adverse construction being placed on his intimacy with his wife. But Lord Lillburne had set himself the task of effacing the evil consequences of Dick's imprudence. His marriage with Shelah, which he would work heaven and earth to compass, would accomplish what he had begun.

'Come and sit down, Dick,' he continued. 'I suppose your regiment having moved to Wind-

sor accounts for our not having seen anything of you lately. I have pleasant intelligence for you. A few days back I had a long conversation, in your interests, with Colonel Carmichael. I am not at liberty to repeat all that passed between us; but this much I can say, you may continue to indulge in a certain dream that I am convinced has for some time occupied both your waking and sleeping hours. Its fulfilment may be delayed, but there's a good day in store for you.'

Captain Thornton started; he could not misunderstand the meaning of these words, and they thrilled through him. Was it possible he had been too precipitate in the matter of his exchange—requiring nothing now but his signature to render it irrevocable? Could it be that he looked upon his own wrong-doing with too great severity? that he might still aspire, as Lord Lillburne's words gave him every reason for believing, to such supreme happiness as a marriage with Shelah promised? Why, why might he not try his chance?

For one moment this maddening reflection took supreme hold of Thornton, and then he cast it from him. Even if there were the remotest possibility of his finding favour in Shelah's eyes, he had, by betraying the trust Lord Lillburne had placed in him, forfeited all right to

profit by such kindness as his. And as Dick listened to the plans he was forming for his life-long happiness, he was filled with greater contrition than he had ever before experienced. He dared not, however, betray the emotions convulsing his soul, and yet he must give some explanation for resigning Shelah. As he hesitated what to say, Lord Lillburne said, with surprise,

'Why, Dick, it appears as though too much joy had struck you dumb.'

Captain Thornton smiled very sadly as he replied,

'Lord Lillburne, as you know, I love Shelah with my whole heart and soul. But you are mistaken. I have no hope of my affection being ever returned. I have relinquished all such ideas.'

'Relinquished all such ideas? I don't believe it. Some lovers quarrel; that can be arranged.'

'Not so, I can assure you. Shelah is unconscious, perhaps, of her own feelings. But they will be made known to her some day, and then she will marry Colonel Carmichael.'

Captain Thornton rose as he spoke, for Lady Lillburne approached and expressed her desire to leave. Lord Lillburne gladly acquiesced; then turning to Dick, said, with a look of deep vexation,

'You are completely in error, Dick. Come and see us to-morrow, and I will make things clearer to you.'

But on the morrow Captain Thornton was speeding away by express train, in obedience to a summons he had received to attend a sister's death-bed. And little did either he or Lord Lillburne surmise that they had parted that evening never again to meet on this earth.

CHAPTER XX.

When acquainted with the arrangements made by Colonel Carmichael for the autumn months, Lady Ballina, not being called upon to quit London herself before the termination of the season, expressed unqualified approval of all his plans. Indeed, she was very much gratified that her step-daughter's departure should precede her own. It was still early in July, and, when she had the house to herself, she reflected with considerable satisfaction that she could make the announcement of that entertainment she had hitherto been prevented from giving owing to Shelah's filial objections. She now decided that this entertainment, which was to display the gorgeousness of her new mansion, should be on the grandest scale, and take the form of a concert. And, without revealing her intention to anyone, she at once engaged all the most eminent singers of the day, including those brilliant stars, Grisi and Mario; for she had been

told by Lady Lillburne that this was the surest way of ensuring the presence of the *élite* of society at her house; and with her aid and countenance, both of which she intended to demand, notwithstanding all the humiliating snubs that lady had so lately heaped upon her, she felt sure of a brilliant success, accompanied by the triumphant reflection that it would owe nothing to her step-daughter's presence. If Lady Lillburne refused to stand by her on this occasion, and behaved with any further supercilious impertinence, then let the consequences fall upon her own head. As she conducted herself, so would Lady Ballina's pitiful vengeance be either averted or precipitated.

It must not be supposed Lady Ballina had lost all remembrance of the husband she had so tragically lost, and who had conferred on her a long-coveted title. But three years are three years, an extended period for continued mourning. And then Lady Ballina had never forgotten that, while she had endangered her fortune to free the man she loved from debt, he had never even made a semblance of loving her. Shelah had been the idol of his heart. It was well that this loved daughter should prolong her time of mourning, if she felt so inclined. She was young, and had years of enjoyment before her. For her-

self, life was too short to curtail any of its pleasures, or to delay further her introduction into London society.

Previous to leaving Ireland, Colonel Carmichael, after mature deliberation, determined to seek an interview with Captain Thornton, for if, as he himself believed, and Lord Lillburne seemed assured, Shelah cared for him, it would be his imperative duty to exert the authority his guardianship over her demanded in a way that might prove very painful to him. Of course everything he had heard detrimental to Thornton might be gross exaggeration, but of this he must be certain. The relief Hugh experienced when he was informed he had left London made him realize how he had dreaded the result of this interview. He desired Shelah's happiness, but wished himself to be its author, and rejoiced that, for a time at least, there would be none to interfere between them. It was, however, in rather faltering accents he announced Dick's departure to her. But, notwithstanding she expressed the greatest sympathy for the event that had called him away, her spirits rose perceptibly during the next few days. The fact was, she was considerably relieved there was no further chance of their meeting again, until his departure for India was publicly known, when she

would be relieved from further secrecy with Hugh. But Shelah did not waste much time in reflection on poor Dick, she was far too much occupied in exercising the power subtle instinct soon made her discover she had over Hugh, notwithstanding Lady Ballina's constant allusions to his undying recollection of a former attachment that must preclude his ever having another. And, when he again talked of leaving for Ireland, she said, gaily,

'I insist on your staying here for a whole fortnight longer. There is no occasion for you to hurry away, I am satisfied my interests are quite safe in Uncle Fitz-Maurice's hands. Beyond the parks, I know nothing of this great city. I have been waiting for you to take me everywhere, and you will not disappoint me, Hugh, I know.'

Delighted at her proposition, he answered,

'And, if I stay, what becomes of your anxiety to leave London?'

'I will keep it in abeyance. At the end of a fortnight I can tell you whether I hate London more or less than hitherto. I think, if I had an occupation of some sort, I might not have found it so hateful. I have had so little to do, no one to care for, no one's happiness to consider except my own since my dear father's

death, that time has hung heavy on my hands. But now everything is different.'

'It is, I acknowledge, doleful to have nothing to do, Shelah, though many people seem to be quite content wasting their strength 'in strenuous idleness.' This could never be your case. The truth is, you have been living in an uncongenial atmosphere, and have been in discord with your surroundings. We must remedy all this. But, I forgot, you said just now that everything is changed. May I venture to ask what has caused this change?' he asked, fixing his eyes jealously upon her.

'Of course you may ask, but I am not forced to answer, am I?' she replied, demurely. Then, observing a look of vexation pass over his face, she said, in a low voice, with the colour mantling her cheek, 'Your return, for one thing, has changed the aspect of life for me, Hugh.'

'That is pleasant to hear. I am glad to find I am still something in your life, Shelah. But tell me, to dispel the weariness of your past days, why did you never undertake some philanthropic work? This would have been quite suited to your tastes, I know.'

'I endeavoured to do this, but when I spoke about it to Lady Ballina, oh, Hugh! if you could have seen her face, it makes me laugh to

think of it. She declared she had never heard such an indelicate, eccentric, and selfish idea in her whole life, and that she would not hear of my doing anything of the kind, as I might bring some horrid disorder into the house, and that she was most liable to infection. Then, whenever I have asked her to accompany me to some picture-gallery or other place of interest, she always answered, "The calls of society are so overwhelming, I have no time to waste in museums, picture-galleries, or places of that sort." And yet,' added Shelah, with a mischievous smile, 'she knows hardly anybody, Hugh.'

'Poor Lady Ballina,' replied Hugh, laughing, 'she is to be pitied. You must be merciful, Shelah, for getting on in society is, without doubt, the hardest work in the world, hard as the tread-mill and about as satisfactory in its results. But, if our sight-seeing is to be got through in a fortnight, we have hard work before us, though it will be pleasant work. Shall we begin this very day? And what with? Speak, your willing slave awaits your orders.'

'Let us begin with the old Abbey,' she replied, after a momentary reflection. 'I have long wished to explore every nook and corner of it.'

'With all my heart. Shall we take a hansom?'

'Delightful! I have never been in one, and I am so weary of eternal shopping and driving in Lady Ballina's chariot, with those tall, flour-headed foot-men solemnly letting down the steps and standing at attention. I really think I should prefer going on the top of an omnibus, Hugh, if it were only for the fun of seeing the expression of Lady Ballina's face if she met us.'

Shelah laughed, as she speeded away to prepare for an expedition in every way suited to her inclinations.

'Oh! if I could only believe he was a little jealous, how happy I should be,' she reflected, as she dressed herself in her daintest attire. 'He evidently thinks there is some mysterious understanding between me and poor Captain Thornton. I cannot, if I wished, undeceive him yet.' A malicious little smile passed over her face as she mentally added, 'But it will do him no harm to think this a little longer, for very soon he will know Captain Thornton is leaving England, and has no intention of asking me to accompany him, and I wouldn't go, dear Hugh, if he did. Shall I ever be able to tell you this?' she said, in a low voice.

The next fortnight was one of almost unalloyed happiness to both Hugh and Shelah. They visited every nook and corner of London to-

gether, and Lady Ballina dared not interfere, for she had a wholesome awe of Hugh that did not, however, prevent her from striving to work him mischief. Happily unaware of this, and perfectly content in each other's society, he and Shelah had unconsciously and naturally fallen into their old relations towards each other, with the exception of a little more formality on both sides. All past sorrow seemed to have been swept from her mind, and she became once more her brightest and most fascinating self. Unknown to herself, she acted with an innocent coquetry that was alike bewitching and bewildering to Hugh. By tacit consent Dick Thornton's name was never mentioned between them. They knew his sister still lived though her case was hopeless, and to no one had he given the slightest intimation when he was likely to return to London. But on the very day before Shelah was to leave town, her happy fortnight having come a conclusion, she heard through Lord Lillburne that Dick was returning immediately, as his sister's death had taken place. Knowing that he was deeply attached to her, Shelah was much grieved for his sorrow; but, when Hugh called for her in the afternoon, the reflection that this would be their last ride together for some time to come placed Dick's trouble in the background of her thoughts.

The day was lovely, and they were going to make rather a long expedition into the country, and, notwithstanding she and Hugh were to part the following day, peace and satisfaction reigned in her soul, for she was going to take up her abode in his place, and then it would be impossible to meet Captain Thornton previous to her departure. As light of heart she chatted gaily to Hugh on their return home through Regent's Park, she suddenly became aware that he had appeared gloomy and taciturn. The truth was he attributed her bright spirits to the return of Dick Thornton, and his own fell proportionally. Looking up at him archly, she said,

'You are very silent and grave, Hugh, I trust it is at the prospect of parting from me so soon.'

'I might retort that you are wonderfully cheerful, considering that we are going to part to-morrow, Shelah. May I venture to ask if it is Captain Thornton's return that has so raised your spirits.'

Shelah's heart bounded with joy, as she replied, demurely,

'Naturally I shall be very glad to see Captain Thornton again.' She gave a side-long glance at her companion. 'I feel very much for him, he loved his sister so deeply. He is such a devoted son and brother,—this is my chief reason for

liking him as truly as I do. But as I leave to-morrow there is no chance of our meeting at present.'

Hugh was too much in love to distinguish that sentiments of affection so openly avowed meant nothing, and without turning his eyes on Shelah, and pulling furiously at his moustache, he asked,

'Do you like him so very much, Shelah?'

'How could I help liking him, when we have been so much together, and he has been so kind to me always? You will like him also, Hugh, when you know him better.'

'Shall I?' he replied, drily.

'Yes, you will like him not only because I do, but for all his good qualities. And you will be able to get better acquainted with each other if he comes to stay at St. Bevans. I am so glad you have asked him.'

Slightly afraid of her own audacity, Shelah ventured another little glance at Hugh, to find his eyes fixed upon her with the deepest sorrow and concern. She coloured and lowered her own, while her lips quivered half in mischief and half in astonishment at her own temerity. Her whole manner and bearing, however, tended to strengthen into certainty what had hitherto been with him but doubtful surmise. He did not

believe Shelah to have made any clandestine engagement with Thornton, but that her heart was in his keeping he no longer doubted. And was his to be the hand to separate them? to inflict such a blow on the woman he loved? At this reflection he determined to wait patiently —to act calmly and dispassionately. Captain Thornton should be his own judge. If he pronounced himself worthy of becoming Shelah's husband, then let events, however adverse they might prove as far as he himself was concerned, take their course. Shelah's happiness before everything. And, in the exaltation of such sentiments, Hugh devoutly trusted that Thornton would pass through his coming ordeal unscathed. It had not taken long for these thoughts to flit through his mind, but quite long enough to cause Shelah to wonder what he was thinking about. At last she said,

'Hugh, why have you got your considering cap on? Luxuriant as is your moustache, if you tug at it so furiously you will soon have none left.'

He smiled, saying,

'I am thinking of a great many things, Shelah, principally about you.' This with a tender inflection of voice. 'Supposing Captain Thornton refuses my invitation—for you know he may—would you be very disappointed?'

'What makes you think he is likely to refuse your invitation?' she asked, thrown off her guard. But those keen, grey eyes were again fixed questioningly upon her, and she added, with charmingly impertinent confidence, 'I am sure no trifling circumstance would prevent his coming where I am.'

'Of that I am certain,' he replied, drily. 'I am not surprised at his appreciating your society.' There was great irritation in the tone of his voice, irritation that filled his hearer with pleasure.

'He *is* jealous,' she mentally ejaculated; then, looking up saucily, she replied, 'I am glad you have arrived at this flattering conclusion, and now let us take a canter.'

She touched her horse lightly. After a few minutes, having reined in their steeds, she said, in a low voice, for she was about to make a great venture, and was nervous,

'Hugh, do you believe there is such a thing as second love? That if one has cared very—very much for one person, and been disappointed, one can love again? Of course, it could never be as deeply.'

Hugh started, was she alluding to herself? Was she dwelling upon the possibility of disappointment in her own case? He tried to read

on her face the answer she desired to receive. But she had turned her head away. If it was discouraging, she had no wish he should witness the pain he had caused. In an agitated voice, he replied, quickly,

'Not only do I believe one can love a second time, Shelah, but I am sure the second love is often the truest and most lasting. When we are very young, we are carried away by the glamour of our imagination. We gild our idols with fancied virtues, to discover, on closer acquaintance, our mistake.

> "As charm by charm unwinds,
> Which robed our idols, we see too sure
> Nor worth nor beauty dwells from out the minds
> Ideal shape of such."

The cure, if bitter, Shelah, is I can assure you very effectual.'

'These are Byron's lines you have quoted. As far as I am concerned, I cannot imagine the existence of a second love under any circumstances.'

'Not even if the object of a first love prove unworthy, Shelah?'

'Ah, that is a point I have never considered,' she replied, lightly.

'And I pray you may never have to consider it. But it is getting late; we must hurry home,

if we are to escape a lecture on "les convenances" from Lady Ballina.'

Arrived in Grosvenor Place, Hugh followed Shelah into the house. As they stood for a few moments alone in the hall, he took her hands in his, and placed his lips on her forehead, as he said,

'God bless you, my sweet Shelah. May your faith in those you love never be rudely broken.'

'It never can,' she replied, with a low laugh. 'Never, never.'

The hall was too dark for him to observe the deep and conscious blush mantling the girl's cheek, called forth by a caress more loving than he was conscious of.

'My poor Shelah, she is infatuated about this man,' he reflected, as he despairingly turned away and left the house.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE parting between Shelah and her step-mother was uncharacterised by the slightest pretence of a sorrow neither of them experienced. The girl held out her hand, and, stooping forward, Lady Ballina pecked at her cheek,—an embrace it could not be termed. Her head was occupied with her intended concert, while Shelah was unable to disguise her uncomplimentary cheerfulness as she bade Lady Ballina farewell, and drove away with the hilarious Bridget to the Paddington station.

'May it please the saints I've turned me back on that mansion for the rest of me days!' mentally ejaculated Bridget, as, cumbered with many parcels, she plumped down on the seat opposite her mistress. 'There's not one of ye I ever wish to lay eyes on again.'

She nodded contemptuously to the dignified and powdered footmen standing at the hall-door, who had made her life one long day of humilia-

tion, proudly and silently as she had carried herself under circumstances so exasperating. From a top window Lady Ballina's French maid, who was a Catholic, and watching the departure, observed, 'Quelle femme barbare et tout a fait ridicule.' She hated Bridget, who had given her sundry admonitions on the neglect of her religion. Arrived at the station, they found Colonel Carmichael waiting for them, and, leaving Bridget to look after the luggage, he led Shelah to the carriage he had engaged, and, having procured every periodical likely to amuse her, he remained at the carriage-door, absorbed for a few moments in meditation. Shelah's unabated cheerfulness at the moment of parting depressed him. Ere they met again much might have occurred to cast a gloom over her present joyousness. These were very sombre thoughts, from which he was roused by Shelah's gently removing his hand from his moustache, as she said,

'You are really merciless to that poor moustache. Either you are weighted with some very disagreeable subject of reflection, or you are callous to the thought of our parting; and this, sir, should alone occupy your mind at such a moment.'

'Callous at the thought of parting from you,

my darling,' he exclaimed, in sudden forgetfulness of the proprieties. Then, seeing mischief lurking in the corners of the girl's mouth, he added quickly, with a reproachful smile, 'But I am certain you do not really believe this. You are only exerting your woman's privilege of tormenting a too submissive slave.'

'Then, if you are a submissive slave, prove the truth of your assertion by telling me what occupies your thoughts at this moment You used to have perfect confidence in me once, Hugh,' she said, coaxingly.

'Ah, Shelah, I might answer with a "tu quoque." Those who demand confidence should be willing to accord it.'

'I quite agree, and shortly, very shortly, you shall have mine in all its fulness, and in return I shall expect yours.'

These reassuring words raising Hugh's spirits had hardly escaped her lips, when a man rushed hurriedly up to the carriage-door, holding in his hand a letter with a deep, black border. As in extreme astonishment Shelah exclaimed, 'Captain Thornton's valet!' Hugh drew quickly back, with a flushed and stern countenance, while the servant, having given the letter into Shelah's hand, touched his hat respectfully, saying,

'The captain desired me to give this letter into your own hands or Mrs. Bridget's, Miss Fitz-Maurice, and, hearing you had left Grosvenor Place, I at once came off in a cab, for the captain was very particular there should be no mistake in your receiving it. Any message back, miss?'

'None,' replied Shelah, curtly, as she flung the letter impatiently on the seat opposite her, while the man, believing himself to have done a very clever thing, and to have displayed a most commendable zeal in his master's cause, touched his hat again and hastily retired, in the rapidity of his movements nearly upsetting Bridget, who was frantically struggling with several loose packages while breathlessly running at full speed in order to catch the train, which an overworked and fussy porter declared was on the point of starting.

With his usual kindness, Hugh helped the excited woman into the carriage, and, as she sank exhausted into her seat, turned to Shelah, saying, gravely and coldly,

'You have still a couple of minutes, Shelah. Pray do not let me prove any hindrance to your reading that letter. To be sent by special messenger, it must contain matter of great importance and of deep interest to you.'

'I am not in the slightest hurry to read it. Even if I wished, I cannot write an answer in the train, and I can open it by-and-by.'

There were tears of vexation in Shelah's eyes. Could anything have been more unfortunate than this horrid letter arriving just at this moment? Suddenly, however, it struck the discomfited girl that, if she opened it, the contents might relieve her from that promise of secrecy enjoined upon her by Captain Thornton, and, if so, perfect confidence might once more reign between herself and Hugh. Before she could put her intention into execution, a cry of 'Stand back!' caused Hugh to say hastily, as he extended his hand,

'The train is starting. Good-bye, Shelah. You will of course write as soon as you arrive at St. Bevans. I shall not leave for Ireland for a few days. I find business will detain me in London.'

Bewildered and miserable, Shelah had only time to hastily return his farewell. But from the window through blinding tears she watched his tall, soldier-like figure as long as it remained in sight, and had the satisfaction of observing he remained on the platform until the train had moved out of the station. Fairly started on her journey, the tears fell fast from her eyes

at the remembrance of his stern face of disapprobation as he bade her a last farewell, and she firmly resolved, whatever might be the contents of Captain Thornton's letter, to let him know he must absolve her from all further promise of secrecy respecting his movements, at least as far as Hugh was concerned.

Bridget, strong in the belief that her mistress's tears could arise from no other source than sorrow at temporary separation from the 'dear colonel,' refrained from administering consolation to such natural grief. And after a few moments, partially comforted by the resolution at which she had arrived, Shelah picked up Dick Thornton's despised missive, and with languid interest broke the seal. Her attention, however, was aroused by the very first words she read, and soon she became absorbed in the contents of 'this horrid letter'—as she had termed it.

'DEAREST SHELAH,' it began. (What right has he to address me in this familiar manner? was her first indignant protest, but she was quickly mollified by what followed.) 'Forgive me for once again calling you by your dear name, indeed for addressing you at all after our last parting that I fully intended should be final. But certain reflections on my conduct,

in a letter written to me by Lady Ballina, and received only yesterday, forces me to exonerate myself in your eyes from accusations wholly false. She tells me I am accused of having trifled with your affections, of having tried to win your dear and priceless love without serious intentions. You, at least, do not, cannot believe I could be so base, so utterly contemptible. Yet, in the unfortunate possibility of your deeming you have just reason to despise me, I feel constrained to clear myself from your step-mother's accusations before I leave England, perhaps never to return. Shelah, pearl of women, though I know too well you entertain for me no other feelings but a kind and generous friendship, you must have discovered that I love you with my whole heart and soul. Even now, if I had the most distant hope of winning your love, I would work heaven and earth to become worthy of you. But I am well aware I have no chance, and never had the remotest of becoming the possessor of so priceless a treasure. I strove to deceive myself, but lately I have realised this stern truth. Notwithstanding, in days to come, when you are united to one you love, who is in every way deserving to be the partner of your future life, think kindly of him who, recognising all his own im-

perfection, how undeserving he was to compete for your love, can never forget you. Hopeless my love is, hopeless it must ever remain. Notwithstanding, had it not been for Lady Ballina's letter, I should not even have allowed myself the poor privilege of acknowledging this to you. Farewell, beloved Shelah, for ever.

'RICHARD THORNTON.

'P.S.—This letter requires no answer, but yet it would be some consolation to know that you believe me, and are not offended at its having been written.'

No words can describe the mingled feelings of sorrow and commiseration for Captain Thornton, and contempt for and indignation against her step-mother that overwhelmed Shelah after the perusal of this sad letter. That Lady Ballina should have, without consulting her, brought such an accusation against her kind friend was most humiliating to Shelah's pride. Perhaps she had even asked him his intentions, and this it was that had called forth this passionate acknowledgment of an affection it was not in her power to return, and which she had been so grateful had not been more openly declared when they last met.

The gentle Shelah stamped her foot at this

supposition, for which there was ample justification. But as she re-read poor Dick Thornton's letter, which was more or less of an enigma to her, she forgot all personal cause of offence in the pity and compassion its contents awakened. There was a deep mystery underlying every line of it she failed to fathom. That he had some other cause of despondency and disappointment beyond what attached to herself she could not doubt, any more than she could the truth and fervency of his attachment. The very fact that she could make no return for this wealth of wasted love made her mourn its avowal. Yet the more she reflected on the subject the more certain she was that, except for Lady Ballina's unwarrantable interference, it would never have been made. A girl's first love-letter, even when the sentiments it expresses are not reciprocated, cannot fail to be deeply interesting to her, and the reflections Shelah's first missive of this kind gave rise to kept her plentifully occupied until they reached their journey's end; here an open carriage, ordered by Hugh, awaited them.

After her long summer residence in the heat and disquietude of London, the enchantment of finding herself once more in the pure, fragrant air of the country, the sight of the cool, verdant

trees, the song of the larks pouring out a flood of melody over the golden cornfields ripe for harvest, filled Shelah's soul with such intoxicating delight that her spirits, which had been much depressed by Dick's letter, rose again. And as the carriage swept up a gentle incline, first through a beech-wood and then through the deer-park of St. Bevans, she forgot everything except that she was in the most lovely place she had ever seen, and that it was Hugh's. Eagerly she looked out for the sea, and when, as they drove up to the door of Hugh's stately home, she beheld it at no great distance lying blue and placid beneath the cloudless sky, her ecstacy was complete, and, stretching out her hands towards its vast expanse, as though greeting an old friend, she positively shouted with joy from the gladness of her heart.

But all her happiness in finding herself once more in congenial surroundings did not prevent Shelah writing a few kind words to Captain Thornton. He had not released her from her promise of secrecy respecting his departure for India. This was annoying, but his movements must soon be generally known, and a feeling of bashfulness withheld her from acquainting Hugh with the contents of his letter.

It was unfortunate for Lady Ballina that she

found it impossible to wreak her malice on Lady Lillburne without injuring Captain Thornton, whom she really liked, for he had always been kind and civil to her. But if Lady Lillburne refused to countenance the entertainment she had in view, and if, in consequence, she basely endeavoured to injure her by sending the letter she held in her possession to Lord Lillburne, his views with respect to the marriage between Shelah and Captain Thornton might undergo a complete change, while Colonel Carmichael's prospects would be strengthened and advanced. This was a problem she had conned over many times, and considered she had solved it by boldly writing and asking Dick Thornton his intentions, at the same time telling him his behaviour to her beloved step-daughter had been too marked to escape her attention or that of others, while he was accused even by Lady Lillburne of trifling with her affections. With the result of this letter, so different to what the writer anticipated, we are already acquainted. Having sent it, she proceeded to pay Lady Lillburne a visit.

The relations between these ladies had been materially strained of late. Captain Thornton having left London, and Hugh being entirely occupied with Shelah, Mabel found little amusement in going to Grosvenor Place, and not only

refused Lady Ballina's constant invitations, but on more than one occasion—unconscious she was heaping coals of wrath on her own head—had omitted including her in those which, at her husband's desire, she sent to Colonel Carmichael and Shelah. In fact, Mabel had decided to gradually drop an acquaintance out of which she could cull no further advantage; for, from certain words of Hugh's to her husband, she was assured Shelah would very soon be withdrawn from her step-mother's care. The pain and humiliation this unkind decision might give Lady Ballina did not trouble a woman so centred in self as Mabel. She had ceased to take even malicious amusement in tormenting her former ally, or to occupy herself with her affairs. And she was consequently disagreeably disturbed when, a few days after Shelah's departure, the door of her boudoir was thrown open and Lady Ballina was announced. Springing from the sofa she said loudly, as she made an effort to escape,

'I am not at home.'

'It is a pity I should already be in the room when you make that civil announcement,' observed the unwelcome visitor, who had hurried quickly in.

'Ah! it's you?' replied Lady Lillburne, languidly, and sinking back on the sofa. 'How

are you? It's ages since we have met. Have you anything very particular to say, for I am going out driving with Lillburne, and he does not like to be kept waiting?'

'You have become a model couple, I am aware,' ironically responded the undesired visitor. 'I should be sorry to be the means of keeping you apart for a single instant. My business, however, will not take long. I have come to tell you, in the first place, that I expect Captain Thornton will propose for Shelah as soon as he returns to town.'—Lady Lillburne had a fan in her hand, and opening it, her enemy was unable to see her face. As she remained silent, Lady Ballina continued, 'Of course, I knew this subject would much interest you.'

'Why do you think it must interest me supremely?' suddenly asked Lady Lillburne, dropping the fan and raising her head proudly. 'I am extremely sorry to hear that Dick intends proposing for Shelah, for as she is in love with Colonel Carmichael—a fact patent to everyone with eyes in their head—she will, of course, refuse poor Dick, and so I have told Lillburne.'

'I have no doubt you would like to think this. Nevertheless, however different our opinion on the subject may be, it will not alter circumstances.'

'I am quite at a loss to understand what you mean,' haughtily replied Lady Lillburne; 'and if you have simply come to make this communication to me, as it is made, perhaps you will excuse my going to put on my bonnet, and wishing you good-bye. I have no desire to be rude; but I have an appointment.'

'But it is not all I have to say. We have seen little of each other lately, I can forgive your desertion of me, seeing it is occasioned by the fulfilment of your conjugal duties. Yet—'

'What is the meaning of your talking this trash to me?' replied Lady Lillburne, angrily. 'What have you got to say to my conjugal duties, as you term them? How dare you interfere in my affairs?'

Mabel rose impetuously as she spoke, and moved towards the door leading to her dressing-room, while Lady Ballina, reflecting she was allowing her bitterness of spirit to interfere with her interests, and having given vent to some of her long-restrained venom, said, deprecatingly,

'Far be it from me to wish to interfere with you in any way, nor have I come with the intention of so doing; but to ask you to fulfil a promise you made long ago to aid me when I gave my first entertainment. I propose giving

a concert, and have engaged all the most eminent singers of the day. I will leave the entire management of everything in your hands if you kindly agree to assist me. No guest shall be invited without your approval, and the cards shall be sent out with your name in addition to mine.'

As her visitor spoke, Lady Lillburne returned slowly back from the door, and remained standing in the middle of the room. When she had concluded, she burst out laughing, saying,

'I am quite overwhelmed at the honour you propose conferring on me; but, notwithstanding, I decline it.'

'You decline it!' exclaimed Lady Ballina.

'Most emphatically,' replied Mabel. 'I can give concerts of my own, if I feel inclined. Lillburne has even urged me lately to do so, and I have refused. In the name of all that is sensible, what do you want to give a concert for? I don't say that certain of the *élite* would not come to it, especially if they knew you had the divine Mario to sing. Yes, they would come in shoals, the world is thus constituted.'—Lady Lillburne laughed again.—'But hardly one of your guests would ask you to their houses in return, except perhaps to a drum. Wait until Shelah comes out. I have always

told you that was your best chance of gaining a footing in society—your trump card, in fact.'

From red to white and white to red had Lady Ballina's face changed as she found all her hopes completely crushed, while she had the annoyance of reflecting that every singer had been already engaged. But, if her mortification at the insulting manner of Lady Lillburne's refusal was intense, the knowledge that she had revenge in her power helped her to bear it with apparent equanimity.

'Is this your last word? Will nothing alter your unkind determination?' she said, coming close up to Lady Lillburne, and fixing her eyes, glittering with anger and disappointment, upon Mabel, who replied, nonchalantly,

'Don't be so tragical. I can assure you our world is not the paradise you picture, and my refusal will save you much heart-burning and worry. And now I must not delay any longer. There is Lillburne's gentle voice calling me. Pray forgive any apparent rudeness on my part.'

As Lady Lillburne made another effort to escape her unwelcome visitor, she laid hold of her dress, saying, imploringly,

'Do not let this be your last word. For your own sake, comply with my request.'

'For my sake! Are you mad?' exclaimed

Lady Lillburne, plucking her dress forcibly from her now desperate visitor's grasp.

But her infatuated desire for social advancement was even greater than Lady Ballina's desire to revenge Mabel's past slights and humiliations, and she replied, vehemently,

'I am not mad; but you must be well aware your reputation does not stand unblemished in the eyes of the world. You despise me, yet I have it in my power to mar it still further.'

'You threaten me!' exclaimed Lady Lillburne, haughtily, her eyes blazing with contempt. 'From this day forth I ignore your existence!' and, thrusting Lady Ballina aside as she spoke, she sailed proudly out of the room, leaving her infuriated and now avowed enemy completely foiled, who hissed out, malignantly,

'You will ignore my existence,—be it so. The day will soon come when your best friends will ignore yours.'

CHAPTER XXII.

Hugh Carmichael was one of those characters to whom certainty, however disagreeable, is far more acceptable than any amount of pleasing self-deception, and, having no longer the slightest doubt there was a mysterious understanding between Thornton and Shelah, he resolved to remain in town a few days longer, see Captain Thornton, and demand the reason of the secrecy he had enjoined upon her. Arrived at his lodgings in no very happy frame of mind, he found to his surprise a letter from the very man he wished to see, informing him he was in London, and greatly desired to have some private conversation with him on a subject deeply interesting to both, if Colonel Carmichael would appoint a meeting.

'Well, anything is better than suspense, even though the solution of this mystery will most assuredly crush every lingering hope I may have foolishly entertained,' murmured Hugh, as he sat down to answer Dick's letter.

Morosely did he view the world at this moment, nor did he regard it more cheerfully when on the following morning he received a letter from Shelah, written in the highest spirits, containing rapturous expressions of admiration of his place, but offering not the slighest explanation of the letter she had received at the station, beyond a hope that when they next met she would be able to reveal its contents to him, for then there would be no further necessity for secrecy.

'She intends to tell me nothing,' was his self-tormenting reflection.

For the next few days Hugh wandered about like a restless ghost, haunting every spot he had visited with Shelah during the happy fortnight they had passed together. He went neither to Grosvenor Place, nor to the Lillburnes; indeed, except when he had dined there with Shelah, whose presence effectually prevented any allusions to her affairs, he avoided Lord Lillburne, fearing any revival of a topic he did not wish re-opened at present. He thought Lord Lillburne looked alarmingly ill, and Mabel appeared at all times troubled and distrait, but apparent harmony reigned between them. By mutual consent, they had arranged to leave London sooner than they had originally decided. Yet this earlier move had simply been agreed upon

because life in London had become intolerable to both. Mabel knew all her former friends were unsparing in their biting remarks on her husband's constant attendance upon her, while he, strong in a sense of duty, determinately adhered to the line of conduct he had marked out for himself, unmindful of the world's sarcasm, though he was unutterably weary of his uncongenial existence. But Mabel had also another reason for wishing to escape from London. She did not care to run any chance of meeting Lady Ballina again, for though she had held herself so proudly in the presence of the enemy, her threat had not fallen scathless, and over and over again returned to Mabel's remembrance: What power could this ill-bred, spiteful woman have of injuring her? She had certainly done her best to impede the marriage her husband ardently desired to see accomplished; but, though he might suspect this, how could he know the extent to which she had intrigued to prevent it ever taking place, from a desire to retain her influence over her former admirer? Yet perchance it would be politic to conciliate her adversary. This suggestion was, however, rejected with scorn as soon as made. She would not be intimidated by groundless fears. Lady Ballina was powerless to do her harm, while to

renew an objectionable intimacy, when such justifiable reasons offered for breaking it off, would be sheer madness.

When Hugh found himself at the door of Mrs. Thornton's house, where his appointment with her son was to take place, it cannot be said the feelings he entertained for his rival were of an amiable or friendly nature; for, putting aside everything else, he considered that Thornton had not acted in a straightforward way by Shelah or himself. But, if he deemed he had cause of offence against Dick, it was partially forgotten when he found himself face to face with him. Anything less like a happy lover or successful suitor could not well be imagined. His deep mourning enhanced the pallor of his handsome face, and he looked worn and haggard. Hugh was taken aback by his changed appearance. He had certainly experienced a great sorrow, but surely this could hardly account for his woe-stricken appearance? As his visitor entered the room, Dick came hurriedly forward, saying,

'I cannot thank you sufficiently for granting me this interview. Had it not been for my dear sister's illness and death, I should have proposed it before.' He pushed a chair nervously forward for his visitor as he spoke, who replied,

'I know words of sympathy have little power

to soften grief, Captain Thornton, yet, seeing how visibly the effect of yours is impressed on your face, allow me to say how deeply I sympathise in the loss you have sustained, before we touch on other subjects.'

'Thank you very much. I know your words are sincere. Yet I will not deceive you. I have had a great loss certainly, and my sister was the best of women, and this world is so full of trouble, Colonel Carmichael. There are griefs heavier to bear even than the death of loved ones.' Thornton threw himself into a chair and remained silent for a few moments, then suddenly raising his head, he said, abruptly, 'Colonel Carmichael, I love your ward——'

'I am aware of this fact. But surely this can afford you no cause for sorrow.'

'She has told you then——?'

'Shelah has told me nothing, beyond informing me that you have bound her to keep secret what has passed between you.'

'Ah, how generous and good she is. How unlike all other women.'

This speech greatly nettled Hugh, who replied sternly, 'I did not appoint this meeting, Captain Thornton, in order to hear you extol Miss Fitz-Maurice's merits. From life-long acquaintance I am well aware there are few like her. I am here,

as her only protector, to demand a full explanation of your reasons for having bound her to secrecy. Had you not asked for this meeting, I should have demanded it.'

'May I enquire your reason for requiring any explanation from me?'

'I should have thought you could have answered this question yourself, Captain Thornton. Standing in the relation I do to Miss Fitz-Maurice, I have a right to ask if you consider it honourable to have endeavoured to win the affections of so young a girl when you cannot be ignorant of the undesirable notoriety attached to your name with one who is already a wife.'

At these words Captain Thornton sprang to his feet, exclaiming, in violent agitation,

'Colonel Carmichael, no man can mourn more deeply than I do that, by my folly and infatuation, I have caused a word of blame to be attached to a name I have every reason to respect. While guiltless of dishonouring that name, I still acknowledge I am deeply to blame. Too late I became convinced of the greatness of my error. But your accusation of my having tried to win Miss Fitz-Maurice's affections; of this, at least, I am guiltless. My unhappy love would never have been made known to her had not Lady Ballina

informed me I was accused of acting dishonourably in endeavouring to win affections for which I cared nothing. Such an implication fired me at once with a desire to exonerate myself in the good opinion of one who I not only love, but reverence above all other women in the world. To know she is thus loved, Colonel Carmichael, hopeless as is that love, cannot surely harm her?'

Hugh was hardly less agitated than Dick, and there was a tremor in his voice as he replied:

'Hopeless! why hopeless? if you consider yourself worthy of Shelah, and she, as I believe, returns your affection. Her happiness is my first and greatest consideration, and, if you could see no happy termination to your love for her, why did you permit yourself to inspire her young heart with love for you? Why not have spared her all knowledge of yours for her. You speak in enigmas.'

Dick gazed at his interlocutor with sad astonishment, as he replied, with a sorrowful smile,

'You labour under some strange misapprehension. Shelah'—he dwelt lovingly on the name—'cares nothing for me—never has.' Hugh started. 'You will find this out for yourself ere long, Colonel Carmichael, unless you are very blind,' he added, half-humorously; then continued, more vehemently, 'Alas! if for one mo-

ment I thought she cared for me, do you not think I would enter the lists with you and make an effort to win her—that I should find it so easy to leave England ?'

'What do you mean?' exclaimed Hugh, deeply touched by all the evidences Dick had given of a noble character for a short time darkened by the influence of a woman whose power of fascination he had himself experienced. And no longer regarding him as a rival in Shelah's affections, his heart warmed towards him, 'Why should you leave England ?' he asked.

'Because it is my duty. It will be the only effective way of silencing every evil and unjust rumour my conduct has given rise to. My exchange is effected, and I join my new regiment almost immediately.'

Hugh looked very grave as he replied sorrowfully, 'And how will you explain your present actions to Lord Lillburne? He has already discussed with me his great desire for your marriage with Shelah. What can I say to him ?'

'Miss Fitz-Maurice has herself made explanation easy. Tell him she does not care for me. And that to see her the wife of another would be misery greater than I can bear. This is the truth, and will spare me an interview that would be but infinitely painful; for I know how his

heart was set on a marriage between Shelah and myself.'

Laying his hand on Dick's shoulder, Hugh said, softly, 'I will do as you wish. This explanation will perhaps come best from me.'

'Thank you a thousand times. You are a good as well as a brave man. Say some kind word of me to Shelah. I have a presentiment she and I will never meet again.' His voice broke—but recovering himself, he said, quickly, 'Good-bye, I have an appointment at the Horse Guards; do not let me detain you; I am anxious you should see Lord Lillburne at once. This matter settled, I shall feel easier in my mind.'

He put out his hand, and Hugh held it in his with a strong, friendly pressure, as he replied,

'We cannot undo the evil we may have done in the past, Thornton, but, thank God, we can redeem it. You are very young, and the world lies before you. The confidence you have made to me I hold sacred. May God speed you in your future career.'

Then they parted. During the whole of their conversation Lady Lillburne's name had not passed the lips of either, but as Hugh bent his steps towards his lodgings, he reflected with infinite sorrow on the bright young life, so full of promise, over which she had cast a blight.

But love is selfish, and it was with a joy that in its completeness was overpowering, that he sat down to write and tell Shelah that, previous to leaving for Ireland, he would run down to St. Bevans, as he longed to see her again, and had many matters to discuss with her. His letter, however, was not destined to be finished that day, for while engaged so pleasantly, he was interrupted by receiving an urgent message from Lady Lillburne, saying her husband had been taken suddenly ill, and imploring Hugh to come to her at once.

To account for this hasty summons, we must revert to its fatal and unhappy origin. When Lady Ballina had last parted from Lady Lillburne, outraged beyond measure by her cool, contemptuous manner, and the scornful disregard with which she had treated her implied threat, the angry woman did not give time for the grass to grow beneath her feet before she proceeded to put her delayed vengeance into execution. And having taken from the casket, where she kept it carefully locked up, that letter Thornton had thoughtlessly dropt in her drawing-room some weeks before, she enclosed it in a sheet of paper, upon which she wrote in a disguised hand:

'You are deceived by those you most trust.

A friend, who has your interest at heart, considers it a solemn duty to send you the enclosed.'

Lord Lillburne received this wicked missive on the morning of their departure from London. He had been ailing for many days, and was in a very depressed state of mind; for he was grieved and disconcerted at Shelah's having left London, also much annoyed at receiving no intelligence from Dick Thornton, and having no opportunity of again speaking to him on the subject he had so much at heart. He frequently enquired of Mabel if she had heard from him, and she always replied in the negative; for though she had received a letter from Captain Thornton, it was one she dared not show her husband, for it contained his solemn farewell of her, and the announcement of his approaching departure for India. In this letter he confessed his hopeless love for Shelah.

Except inasmuch as it wounded her vanity, this letter did not affect Lady Lillburne so deeply as it formerly would. She had a feeling of satisfaction in the reflection that the marriage Lord Lillburne and Lady Ballina had thought such a certainty would never now take place, and thus the world could not say she had been deserted for a younger and more lovely rival,—a consideration that had greatly

troubled her vanity. Gay, handsome Dick gone from their vicinity would certainly render existence very dull for her. Yet at the same time, considering how matters had turned out—how her husband's jealousy, notwithstanding his endeavours to disguise it, was evidently once more on the alert—perhaps Dick's absence was not an event to be so much deplored, as it would necessarily tend to allay all those suspicions that the world's troublesome tongue might have raised in her husband's mind.

But, notwithstanding such cold, calculating philosophy, Lady Lillburne felt very miserable as she held Captain Thornton's letter in her hand, and she was sadly meditating what answer to make to it, when the door opened and Lord Lillburne entered, holding in his grasp the anonymous letter he had just received. One glance at his stern countenance, as he slowly approached, convinced Mabel that something had occurred. For a moment, fascinated by the awful sternness of his looks, she remained transfixed in her chair, then as he silently placed the letter on the table before her, and she recognised her own handwriting, she uttered a low cry and covered her face with her hands. Even she shrank from witnessing the anguish depicted on her husband's countenance.

CHAPTER XXIII.

Though Lady Ballina, with a mind filled with spite and malice, attached a hidden and more important meaning to the letter she had so cruelly sent Lord Lillburne than its contents really justified, it was notwithstanding one calculated to wound and distress him to the heart's core, as a convincing proof how totally unchanged was his wife's character, how unabated was her duplicity and love of intrigue, and how entirely she had failed to appreciate his past kind confidence and long forbearance. Yet it was strange that—though he held the proof in his hands as to the extent her reckless flirtation with Dick Thornton had been carried, and how even lately, when his love for Shelah was self-evident, she had, notwithstanding her denial, endeavoured to dissuade Captain Thornton from the marriage that her husband, more for her sake than any other reason, was anxious to hurry on—this man

of fiery temperament, so easily moved in the past to violent outbursts of anger, remained calm and outwardly unmoved. Yet it was plain to see that the blow dealt had stricken him to the ground, that the iron had entered into his soul. Once or twice he tried to speak, but utterance failed him. The words were strangled in his throat. Then with a great effort he regained the power of speech he had the terrible consciousness was forsaking him. But his voice was so changed that he himself was startled at its sound.

'Mabel, of what avail to hide your face? you cannot conceal the falseness and perversity of your soul. Though one calling herself a friend has sent me this letter, she must be your bitter enemy. And he to whom it is addressed must have been very careless of your good name to have allowed it to fall into her hands.'

As Lady Lillburne, who was sobbing violently, heard these words, she called to remembrance Lady Ballina's mysterious threat, and guessed at once to whom she owed her present misfortune. How her letter had fallen into her hands she did not stop to consider. Swift remorse, born of fear, had shot like a sharpened arrow into her heart, and she murmured, brokenly,

'Oh, Lillburne! I have been foolish, vain,

guiltily, recklessly imprudent. That is all—all. Captain Thornton has long ceased to pay me the slightest attention, and cares only for Shelah.'

'I am well aware of this. All this season I have observed how studiously he has forsaken our house and avoided your society. Had you entertained one spark of true friendship—generous affection for Captain Thornton, you would have aided him to escape from an infatuation that could only end in misery to you both. The chain he wished to break for ever you endeavour in this letter—how vainly I know—to rivet afresh.'

'Forgive me, forgive me! Do not cast me off as utterly hopeless,' was all Mabel could sob out.

'Forgive you—cast you off! Your having so ill fulfilled your marriage vow does not exempt me from mine. I swore at God's altar to love, honour, and cherish you. When I made that vow I meant to keep it; your lips uttered the same words, but they lied, for they had no echo in your heart. And yet,' he added, pathetically, 'I implored you not to accept me if you had no love for me. It is women like you, who, having no fear of the awful perjury they are guilty of before God and man, too often bring disgrace and dishonour into their husbands' homes. But

I loved you, would have had you honoured and respected by all.' His voice broke, and, looking up through her tears, Mabel strove to take his hand, but he drew sternly back, saying, 'No, no, the touch of your hand can never give me joy again. I have ceased to hope for your love —to wish for it.'

She shuddered as he uttered these words, and, for the first time in her life, Mabel felt an overpowering desire not to lose a love she had so long despised, trampled upon, if not wholly rejected; and, clasping her hands together, she exclaimed, piteously,

'Lillburne, Lillburne, you do not think of a separation between us?'

'Would this thought trouble you?' he asked, with vehement passion. 'Oh, no. You might regret the prestige you would lose by our separation, or you might rejoice in a greater accession of liberty;' there was bitter sarcasm in his tone.

'No, no!' she cried out, in penitent sorrow.

He looked down upon her bowed figure, for she had lain her head on the table before her, and continued,

'Entertain neither fear nor joy. The thought of separation has not crossed my imagination. We have to live down the discredit you have brought on the name I gave you. The anony-

mous sender of this most fatal letter—whom I think I know, and who has not hesitated to act a most despicable part—is not likely to stop here. She wishes to injure you, and, far and wide, will make your folly known—to be magnified in every way by a censorious world.'

He seized the letter from where it lay as he spoke and tore it into atoms with passionate vehemence. As Mabel witnessed the destruction of what had now become hateful in her eyes, a hope rose in her heart of receiving her husband's entire forgiveness; and, again stretching her hands towards him, she cried out,

'Oh, how good you are! how generous and noble!'

But he waived her from him, saying,

'Though you must ever bear my name, though my roof still shelters you, henceforth we remain strangers. I know that, when we first married, my harshness, my jealous love estranged your unloving heart still further from me. But, had you given me the smallest token of affection, all might have been different. Afterwards I met an angel whose soft and winning ways taught me better things, and I strove to win you by kindness, fondly flattering myself I was succeeding, while all the time you were deceiving me. Now your beauty and grace have become

in my sight but hideous deformity. But your soul may yet become white and pure—strive to make it so; repentance, Mabel, is still in your power. To this town I shall never return, and I shall sell this house. In the retirement of the country, in the care and duties of my estate, will my future days be passed.' His wife gave a shuddering sob. 'You shudder at the contemplation of such a life, but remember you have prepared it for yourself.'

He moved towards the door, his strength was at an end. Hitherto excitement had enabled him to go through this distressing interview. But like the sturdy oak that, after long resistance, at last succumbs to the storm, he suddenly tottered, made an effort to recover himself, then fell heavily forward, with a terrible crash, on the floor, calling out,

'Mabel, Mabel, the only woman I have ever loved!'

When, obeying Lady Lillburne's summons, Captain Carmichael arrived at her door, he found the household in the utmost confusion. The hall was encumbered with boxes and parcels, cabs were standing at the door being unloaded, while servants were running to and fro in a state of wild excitement and distraction.

Lord Lillburne had had a paralytic stroke, and was still senseless; while the doctors in attendance doubted his ever recovering consciousness. Lady Lillburne was in violent hysterics, which had been intensified by her maid having sent for Lady Ballina, the pitiful cause of a terrible disaster. On her arrival, Lady Lillburne had not only refused to see her ladyship, but had given orders she was never again to be allowed to enter the house. All these details Hugh gathered from the servants; and, from Mabel's refusal to see Lady Ballina, felt assured that she was in some way connected with the misfortune that had occurred.

When he was ushered into Mabel's room, it was so darkened that it was with difficulty he could discern her form lying on the sofa. But her bitter sobs were plainly audible, and guided him to her side. A maid was bathing her temples with eau-de-cologne, but retired on Hugh's approach, and Mabel seized hold of his hand with feverish haste, saying,

'Hugh, dear kind Hugh. I knew you would come. Oh! this is too dreadful. Let me hold your hand. Let me feel some one near me. I am so frightened, so miserable.'

Hugh stroked her hand soothingly. He had loved her once.

'Try and compose yourself, Mabel. Tell me what has happened? I have long feared your husband was not well. The life he has been recently leading has, I fear, been hurtful to him; but it was for your sake.'

'I know it—I know it. I was beginning to realise this, and then that hateful Lady Ballina by some means got a hold of a foolish letter of mine and sent it to him.'

'She must be a baser woman than even I thought,' exclaimed Hugh, indignantly, divining at once to whom this letter had been written. 'But do not dwell on these circumstances. Think of your husband, who, I fear, is at death's door. Go to him. You should be by his side now. He may recover consciousness at any moment. Yours should be the first face to meet his eyes.'

'No, no,' she replied, wildly. 'He would not care to see me. And do not talk of death. I cannot bear to think of it. But he will not die. Oh! Hugh, tell me he will not die. I have been such a bad wife—and he has been so good, so generous.' She fell back in strong hysterical weeping as she spoke.

As Hugh looked upon this poor, weak woman, so overwhelmed by the consequences of her own misconduct, he was moved with deepest

compassion; but, seeing how completely she had broken down, he thought it better to leave her, and, ringing the bell for her maid, he rose, saying, gently,

'I had intended leaving London to-morrow; but I cannot desert you in this trying moment. I shall be at hand whenever you send for me, or if Lord Lillburne asks to see me.'

'Thank you—thank you,' she moaned. 'I am so frightened. I have no one in the world I can turn to but you.'

'Please God, your husband may yet be spared to you. Go to him. Think only of him. Go to him, I implore you. Good-bye for the present.'

He took her poor, limp hand in his as he spoke and put it to his lips. A flood of recollections swept over her as she felt the touch of those lips, and, without answering, she turned away, and buried her face in her hands.

Contrary to all expectations, Lord Lillburne's illness did not terminate fatally. Both reason and speech were restored to him, though he remained partially paralysed. But the doctors did not despair of his case; by their advice he went abroad for a lengthened period, constant change of air and scene being considered his best chance of ultimate recovery. Notwith-

standing all her friends were loud in their expressions of sympathy at the disagreeable perspective lying before her as the nurse of a violent-tempered, crotchetty invalid, Mabel, to their great astonishment, never breathed a word of complaint, and even appeared full of wifely anxiety for her husband's recovery.

As soon as Lord Lillburne's state showed signs of amelioration, Hugh had a short interview with him, and delivered Thorton's message. To which Lord Lillburne made no reply, beyond saying, sadly,

'The coast is now clear for you, Carmichael. I wish you joy.'

That very evening Hugh started for St. Bevans. Notwithstanding all the sorrow and sadness of the scenes in which he had been forced to take a prominent part, he could not but feel radiantly happy as he found himself driving through his beautiful park on the road to a happiness he had only a short time before deemed could never be his.

When he arrived at St. Bevans, the long summer day was terminating, the sun was sinking into the sea with unusual glory.

'She loves a sunset, she is sure to be absorbed in its contemplation,' he murmured, softly, to himself. He had sent a telegram to Shelah, ap-

prising her of his intended arrival, but, when he reached the house, the butler informed him that having been out boating all day she had not received it; but that if he went down to the harbour he was almost certain to see Miss-Fitz-Maurice returning, as she had expressed her intention of returning at nine.

'Though indeed she often remains out until the moon rises, but she is in safe hands, colonel. You require dinner of course, sir.'

'Dinner, dinner, oh! I don't want any,' replied Hugh, impatiently, hastening away on the wings of his great love to have his fate decided.

He had about a mile to walk, giving him ample time for reflection of divers kinds. As the moment approached, so long and ardently anticipated, undesirable thoughts, sobering his spirits, obtruded themselves with disagreeable pertinacity. Shelah was so young, he was her elder by many years. Had he any right to ask her to bind her young life with his, before she had seen more of the world? Her strong affection for him, her sense of loneliness might mislead her into taking a step she might afterwards regret. These were not pleasant meditations for a lover, and it was with chastened joy he found himself at the small harbour, where his boat anchored, and saw at no great distance her

white sail visible against the crimson and orange sky. What wind there was set dead against the little craft, manned by two experienced sailors, well known to him in his uncle's time, and she had to tack several times to make the shore. So he sat down on a rock close by, and, with the ripple of the incoming tide making soft music in his ears, silently, with emotions too deep for expression, waited the approach of his love. Everything was so still and peaceful, in such contrast to the turbid streams of sorrow and conflicting passions he had left, that, notwithstanding the sager reflections with which he had essayed to tone down the thrilling joy of his heart, a sense of infinite peace stole over him. As the ship neared, he discerned Shelah's tall graceful figure standing up in the boat, and he waved his hand towards her. Quickly she recognised him, and returned his welcoming salute. A couple more tacks brought the boat alongside the little pier. In another moment the girl had sprung on shore and her hands were clasped in Hugh's. She looked so beautiful, so radiantly happy and serene, that he felt as though an angel had alighted from some other sphere to greet him.

> 'She was a woman in her freshest age,
> Of wondrous beauty and of bounty rare,
> With goodly grace and comely personage,
> That was not easy to compare.'

'You have good news, or you would not be here!' she exclaimed. 'But you might have let me know, and I should have remained in the house to welcome you.'

'Exactly what I did not wish you to do, dearest Shelah. Everthing was so uncertain. However, I rejoice to say Lord Lillburne is no longer in immediate danger, and so I decided to pay you a flying visit; but I must scold you for being out so late; it is hardly prudent. Look, the moon has already risen.'

'And the sea is like a mill-pond,' she replied, laughing. 'You forget what safe hands I am in; your two ancient mariners, to whose care you confided me, are provokingly cautious, and always propose turning homewards at the first puff of wind. But let us move on, I am sure you require your dinner, and I want to hear all your news, sad as it may be.'

She bid the two sailors, who had the care of the boat, good-evening, accompanied with a gracious acknowledgment of their services; and Hugh, having given them some directions for the following day, drew her arm within his, and they made their way slowly back to the house.

CHAPTER XXIV.

For some minutes this blissful pair remained silent. Both were so equally and intensely happy in their present close companionship that they feared some adverse word might break the delicious spell enthralling them. Shelah was aware that Hugh and Captain Thornton had met, and did not doubt that as far as he was concerned she had nothing further to conceal from Hugh; therefore, she was not surprised, though the colour mounted in her face, when he said, as he gently took her hand in his,

'Dear Shelah, I know your secret now, for I have seen Captain Thornton. He will not come here, for he has too many arrangements to make previously to leaving for India. But he bids you again farewell, through me. Poor fellow, I pity him deeply, for you did not return his love.'

'That is not so great a misfortune, Hugh.'

'The greatest in the world, I should say,' he vehemently responded.

'Oh, no. He will forget me in time, at least I hope so, with all my heart. Men, you have yourself told me, can love a second time ;' her voice shook.

'And that second love, as I have also told you, Shelah, being almost invariably built on a firmer foundation, is certain to be ten times deeper, truer, and more enduring than the first.'

'Ah, I am glad to hear you affirm this, for then to Captain Thornton I shall in the future remain but a memory——'

'Not so,' exclaimed Hugh. 'For there is but one Shelah in the world. He that has known and loved her, can never love again.' Then Hugh's tongue was magically unloosed, and he poured out in passionate and eloquent words a full acknowledgment of his love for Shelah, and the fears he had entertained that she cared for Dick Thornton, and would disappoint the long hopes he himself had cherished of calling her his wife, not immediately, but after she had had time to consider his proposal, and when she had seen and mingled more in the world. Shelah's heart was beating so violently that for some moments she could not reply to words she so longed to hear. But, notwithstanding his anxiety for her answer, he would not hurry her by any evidence of impatience. He still held her hand,

and felt she trembled. He looked into her face and its expression satisfied him. At last, raising her eyes, she fixed them on him, as she said, with a divine smile,

'The world! You are my world, Hugh, and have been ever since I can remember. I will marry you when you will. A year hence—ten years hence. The time does not signify, for, if I do not marry you, I shall never marry.'

After such an answer what more could be said on either side? In perfect confidence—perfect happiness, for during their onward walk Shelah heard all about Hugh's first love, and thus her latent jealousy of Lady Lillburne was set at rest for ever—they reached the house, and having dined in the merriest of moods—for Hugh would not cast a shadow over Shelah's joyousness, by dwelling on her friend Lord Lillburne's precarious state—they adjourned to the broad terrace running the whole south length of the house. This commanded a full view of the park and surrounding country, shelving down unevenly towards the sea, upon which several fishing-boats became visible, as they glided like phantoms over the broad space of shimmering light cast upon the ocean by the glorious harvest moon.

'What a lovely night!' exclaimed Shelah.

'Whenever I watch the moon reflected on the sea, as it is to-night, I am reminded of Nice and my father. It was not a very happy time I spent there. But he was with me—we were together. And then his marriage took place and ended everything. I am so glad you have decided on my never returning to Lady Ballina's care, and that Uncle Fitz-Maurice has consented to live with me at Ballina until——'

'Until we are married, dearest,' he whispered softly in her ear, for her head lay on his shoulder. 'That is unless you change your mind. In either case'—he smiled in happy confidence—'you will be happier at Ballina than you would be anywhere else, I am sure. And when there you will have plenty of time to decide whether you are making too great a sacrifice of your youth and beauty in marrying me.'

'And you will have time not only to reflect over but perhaps repent of the great sacrifice you have made for my sake in resigning the profession you so love, and in which you have so distinguished yourself.'

'Nay, my Shelah, even if you did not exist, this I should consider my duty. And it is a duty you make so easy for me to fulfil that it permits of no self-glorification. I am glad you approve of all my arrangements. They have

been hastily made. But I had no alternative, for I am constrained to return to London by the earliest train in the morning.'

'Why so soon? To be here together is so enchanting.'

He smiled as he answered, with embarrassment,

'I have no right to be here at all, sweetheart, for, except for Bridget's vigilant eye—which has ceased to be a vigilant one—we are chaperonless. I must at once have a final understanding with Lady Ballina, and then leave for Ireland. When can you be ready to join me there?'

'When? To-morrow. Oh, Hugh, my heart is so full of joy—joy of your creation. To think of once more seeing Ballina seems like a dream. And you will love it also for my sake, and care for those poor people who have been too much neglected for so many years.'

'Most surely, dearest. We will work together for their good, even as did your noble mother. Work and love, that was her ideal of the highest happiness this world can give. We must make it ours also. But it is late, my beloved, I dare not keep you out any longer; and yet I am loth to part from you.' He held her in his arms, and, as she raised her face to his, he said, in a low voice,

'Ere you go, tell me when did you first think you could care for one so much older than yourself?'

'When? the first day we ever met on the bog, when you carried me home,' she replied, laughing. 'I made up my mind then to marry no one else but you.'

'Most true and most constant of Psyches,' he exclaimed, as he held her close to his heart, and looked into her fair, young face. 'You shall be loved as woman never has been or ever will be.'

The next morning, while Shelah still slept, Hugh departed on his journey back to London. His interview with Lady Ballina was short but decisive. After the dastardly action of which she had been guilty, he gave her to understand that her step-daughter was for ever removed from her care. He refused to enter into the slightest explanation, and she was too overwhelmed by a guilty conscience to attempt either expostulation or defence. Deprived of the *éclat* of introducing Shelah into society, and having lost Lady Lillburne's social support, she soon discovered that her chance of effecting an entrance into the world of fashion was for ever ended, and, humiliated and defeated on all sides, Lady Ballina forsook England and retired to the continent again.

A little more than a year has elapsed since the events last recorded. Lord and Lady Lillburne are residing on the banks of Lake Como, where they have taken a villa for the summer months. The day has been fiercely hot, but, since the stroke of paralysis that all but terminated his life, no amount of heat is too much for Lord Lillburne. He sits almost all day in his wheeled invalid chair, in the garden, for he will never walk again, his spine having been hopelessly injured on that terrible night when he was so suddenly struck down. His face, however, looks ruddy and healthy, and is that of a man who has no ailment, and its expression is wholly changed. The harsh lines, the knitted brow are miraculously smoothed away, and in their place reigns nothing but mellowed and chastened peace. At a little distance from where he sits, reading 'Galignani,' Mabel is occupied in tying up some carnations, for of late she has developed a great taste for gardening. If Lord Lillburne is altered in appearance she is more so. She has grown very thin, and her brilliant beauty is dimmed, but what she has lost in colour and brilliancy she has gained in expression—for Mabel has had a long, wearing illness. She has come in contact with what she so dreaded, and has been very near the gates of death. She has

passed through a great ordeal, and it has softened and ennobled her. Still nervous and weak from the effects of illness, she starts violently when her husband calls out, 'Mabel, will you come here?' but she moves at once towards him, observing that he is very pale and appears agitated. As she stands silently beside his chair, he looks up at her sadly, and says, in a low voice,

'The Lillburne title is for ever extinct—Richard Thornton was killed at the siege of Delhi.'

With a cry of anguish Mabel sank down near her husband's chair and covers her face with her hands.

'You grieve, Mabel,' said Lord Lillburne. 'Ah, I do not wonder. But he has died a noble death. He is to be envied. Do not weep so bitterly, my poor Mabel. I believe you have deeply repented the past.'

'I have—I have. None will ever know how deeply.'

'I believe you. It is in your power to confirm this belief still further. To-day I have been told that, though I shall never walk again, I shall most probably live for years. Can you be patient to the end?'

He laid his hand on her head.

'For ever—for ever,' she sobbed out.

A year spent in perfect happiness passes swiftly. As this story began in Ireland, so there it ends.

Shelah and Hugh are once more together at Ballina. He has been there frequently during his self-appointed time of probation, but not in that sacred relationship which now unites them. For they have been married some weeks, and, having spent a halcyon time at St. Bevans have returned to Ballina. Henceforth their days are to be divided between St. Bevans and Shelah's Irish home.

It is late autumn, the same period of the year as when Hugh and Shelah first met in her childhood, and generally the fairest season in Ireland. They are on the lake, making for the Banshee's Island, accompanied by Mick, whose cabin on the bog has long since been changed for a comfortable stone cottage, adjacent to one of the park gates, where he dwells in perfect harmony with Bridget as his wife. For that good woman, having seen the desire of her heart accomplished when Shelah's marriage with Hugh took place —content that her nurseling's happiness is for ever assured—has no longer rejected those advances of Mick's so often made before, though kept secret and not responded to from love for one she had promised never to desert so long as she required her services and devotion.

At the present moment Mick is in the seventh heaven of happiness; for, though he would have preferred his loved young mistress's husband to have been an Irishman, he is satisfied that Hugh is in every way worthy of his queen. Having given her directions as to whither she desires the boat to be steered, Shelah sinks idly back on her seat, and dropping her hand over the side allows the water to play through her fingers. Hugh watches her absorbed countenance with some anxiety; he wonders why she is so desirous to visit a spot so fraught to her with painful memories. She must have divined his thoughts, for, looking up at him with a smile, she said,

'Shall I tell you, dearest, why I no longer fear a visit to the Banshee's Isle? You remember those lines of Moore? or perhaps you have forgotten them, so I will repeat them to you:

> "How oft has the Banshee cried,
> How oft has death untied
> Bright hopes that glory wove,
> Sweet bonds entwined by love."

I can hardly tell you how painfully and vividly those lines used to recur to me when you were in the Crimea.'

'Then, my Shelah, why dwell upon what gives you pain at this happy moment?'

'Because those lines no longer carry any weight with them—raise no alarm in my mind.

Oh, my love,' she continued, in her low, sweet voice, 'it is fortunate that our feelings for each other were reciprocal, for I had another strong reason for marrying you. Listen to the conclusion of the legend in our family.'

She raised her hand aloft, and in solemn tones repeated these words:

'When Fitz-Maurice's only daughter and heiress is united in wedlock to a Saxon warrior, and the Fitz-Maurice lands pass into English hands, the Banshee's voice will be for ever silenced on the Lough.'

Hugh was well aware that to Shelah and her family, as also to many of the Celtic race, the legend of the Banshee was believed in as firmly as it was dreaded, and although he only regarded it as a superstition, still, as all fear of its ever again casting a shadow over Shelah's future happiness was ended, he was perfectly willing to leave uncombated her belief in the Banshee.

THE END.

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